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THE CHAPEL OF EASE.

CHAPTER I.

THE shabby, mud-bespattered stage, with its lean, jaded horses, was toiling slowly up the hill, creaking and groaning from the weight of luggage piled upon the rack behind. Whatever it had once possessed of paint and varnish had long since disappeared, for the mud and sleet of many winters, with the burning sun and dust of as many successive summers, had robbed it of all color. The curtains were buttoned closely down, save at the sides over the doors, where they were rolled up in bulgy, baggy fashion and fastened on the outside by a single button, which threatened to give way with every jolt.

The driver, with his hat pulled well down over his eyes and his coat-collar turned up about his ears, was the very picture of cold discomfort. One muddy foot rested on the brake, ready for any sudden pressure, the other rested on the dilapidated mail-bags. Occasionally he shifted the reins to his left hand or hung them up over his head on a hook placed there for that purpose, while he shook off the little rivulets of water that gathered in the rim of his hat.

He kept glancing back with open curiosity at his only passenger, a woman who sat on the back seat, with the shabby old buffalo robe drawn up over her knees, and who had not vouchsafed him a single remark since getting into the stage at the station. He did not know who she was, nor where she was going, and this constituted a grievance in this part of Maryland, where the stage-driver, plying back and forth daily, was a much-travelled man and knew everybody and everybody's business throughout the county.

But this stranger, with so many queer boxes and so much luggage covered over with labels and tags, was something out of his understanding, and he must find out her destination before he reached the end of his route. She was totally unmindful of his frequent glances, for she was wholly absorbed with her own thoughts. Her gaze was eagerly fixed upon the objects by the wayside. Every mile-post, every

tree, every fence-rail, seemed to possess strange interest for her, and it was evidently an interest entirely apart from the objects themselves, for they looked unutterably dreary in the cold damp air.

Great drops of moisture hung from every vine and twig, and from every dead and dying leaf. Here and there a few red berries gave a touch of color to the brown, ragged underbrush, or the ghostly trunk of a sycamore started out in bold relief against the dark woods. The sky was low, with heavy angry clouds scudding by, dropping fierce showers in their flight, while a keen wind swept down the leaves and blew them into every little hollow and gully by the wayside, there to lie limp and sodden. Over the tops of the hedges and fence-rails there was an occasional glimpse of winter wheat, in tender dress of green, just pricking up in the distant fields, which seemed a veritable mockery upon the cheerless landscape. All nature was weeping and sullen at the parting of the seasons. There was no sound, save the rattle of the vehicle and the drip, drip, from the trees, and there was no sign of habitation as far as eye could reach.

At the top of the hill the horses paused for a panting breath, but only for a moment, for the gruff voice of the driver admonished them to "get up there," and the long circling whip fell upon the leaders and sent them rattling down the hill at top-speed, with the stage swaying from side to side, until the passenger within grasped desperately at the straps which hung at the sides to keep from going headlong out upon the road. A final bump and jerk brought them to the foot of the hill, where the deep mud, just beginning to stiffen a little with the first touch of frost, forced them to slacken up.

The woman passenger shivered and drew up the buffalo robe more closely about her, and leaned back in her corner. The driver turned and glanced stealthily at her; then, squaring himself around to get a deliberate look, he asked, in a most business-like tone,—

"Goin' as far as Rangely?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Goin' beyond?"

"Yes."

He waited a moment, but, getting nothing further, he was forced to turn reluctantly back to his horses. He jerked the reins and splashed recklessly through a puddle which sent up a shower of muddy water; then he pulled up the oil-cloth curtain and settled down stolidly behind it.

All during the lonely stage ride the woman had been absorbed in a maze of dreary thoughts. Each mile-post, each hill and dale, had been fraught with painful memories. She had been likening herself in a whimsical way to the Prodigal Son, who, having spent his substance in riotous living, returned after his wanderings, footsore and weary, to his father's house, bankrupt in everything save repentance. Not that she remembered exactly that he had returned in a stage with a hand-bag, a lot of luggage, and the latest magazines; and she smiled bitterly as she tried to fit the old parable to herself. She had not spent her substance in riotous living, but she was footsore and weary. She too was bankrupt in everything,—youth, hope, love, belief. Her plight

was even worse than the Prodigal Son's, for there was no one to rejoice over her return, to weep over her, to forgive her, to kill the fatted calf for her; there was no one before whom she could prostrate herself and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight."

And as this crushing realization came over her, she shut her lips sternly to keep down the rebellious emotion. She leaned forward and looked out at the fast darkening objects by the roadside, and tried to shut out the memory which continually haunted her,—the memory of a face as she had seen it years ago, when it had pleaded with her to wait a bit, not rashly to give herself to the first man who should seek her, not to give her life into the keeping of a stranger, untried, almost unknown. But she, in her arrogant youth, had thought that she compassed all knowledge, all experience. She not only had not heeded the mother love, but she had even derided it, and had imperiously overridden every appeal, every warning, she had wilfully closed her ears, and had gone forth in all the prodigality of youth and ignorance, to what? She had been cheated, yes, cheated of everything life holds precious.

As her mind turned back over the years, the bitterest recollections confronted her. She remembered the joyousness and pride with which she had left her home after her wedding. She remembered that she had actually pitied those she left behind, because they were to remain shut in forever by fields, streams, woods, and skies, with only the homely country sights and sounds about them for companionship, while she was going into an enchanted world, to go where she pleased and to be free. She smiled faintly as this picture presented itself, but her mind went hurrying on with relentless rush, through years of disillusionment, pain, and mortification, years of wandering from place to place in strange lands, among strange people, all of them hideous to her mind as she recalled them.

These years had brought many letters from home, some of them containing pitiful appeals to come back; one of which, and the last that she had ever received, was lying now in her pocket, crushed by the tension of her fingers. These appeals she had been utterly powerless to heed; she had been chained hand and foot to the galleys. And when the news had come finally that all was over in the old home, and that a guardianship had been left to her, not even then could she go, nor had she been free to indulge one sigh, one moan. She wondered in dull amazement how she had ever drifted into such bondage. Why had she not broken her chains? But then she recalled suddenly the few times that she had made a dash for freedom and the hateful scenes that followed, the weeks of dull despair that she had lived through, somehow. Then, with burning cheek, she recalled the day when the first glimmering idea came to her that her release was at hand, and the shame that she had felt for the involuntary thrill that had surged up from her heart. But that thrill had been amply atoned for in the succeeding weeks, with their daily hand-to-hand struggle with disease. When the release had finally come in a strange land, she had apathetically gathered together what was left to her, and, like the Prodigal, footsore and weary, was turning homeward.

A sudden stopping of the stage roused her from her thoughts ; she glanced out, and by the dim lights of a scattered village she recognized the half-forgotten, half-strange little post-office of Rangely. The mail-bags were thrown out, and the horses rattled their harness and whinnied in anticipation of the watering-trough, as they waited for the changing of the mail.

At last they were off again. And now the smooth turnpike stretched out before them like a faint white thread just discernible in the darkness. As they rattled along, the driver plucked up courage to make one more effort to elicit information from his passenger. He turned and said over his shoulder,—

"Shall I leave you anyw'er's between here and Dorset, ma'am—miss?"

He hesitated whether to address her as madam or miss.

She replied,—

"You may leave me at Chapel House."

"Chapel House?" he quickly repeated, with a questioning inflection of voice.

"Yes, Chapel House," she reiterated, decidedly.

"Very well, miss."

She leaned out, trying to discern in the darkness some familiar thing in the landscape. At last she said, eagerly, as they passed a dark structure,—

"Stop, driver ; turn in this gate."

"Can't, miss ; that gate's been shut up this five years. I'll have to take you round the other way, through Dorset. You must be a stranger in these parts."

"Yes, I am a stranger," she replied, laconically.

Lights suddenly gleamed in front of them.

"That's Dorset, miss," and the driver turned towards her. But there was no reply. The uncertain welcome, and the uncertain future which lay before her, made it impossible for her to speak.

They clattered into the village, past the toll-house, past the blacksmith's, past the old brick court-house so cramped and primitive, past the town-pump standing in the middle of the street. They drew up with a flourish before the brightly lighted post-office and store combined. The blustering rain and keen wind had driven inside the store-loungers who generally hung around the porch. Only two or three broken-backed chairs, a cider-barrel, and a few belated and out-of-season farm-implements guarded the door-way, upon which were posted various notices and advertisements, setting forth respectively the sale of stock in an adjoining county, and a political meeting at the court-house.

As the stage stopped, a few men straggled out from the store. The driver threw down the mail-bags and turned his horses abruptly around without stopping for his usual chat and exchange of news ; for Dorset was the end of the route. The toll-gate-keeper hurried forward at this unusual proceeding on so stormy a night, and as he flashed his lantern into the stage he demanded inquisitively, and in an entirely audible whisper,—

"Where ye goin', Lem, an' who've ye got?"

"Dunno; some one for Chapel House."

Then without pause the stage plunged down a dark road which crossed the turnpike at right angles. The way was not long; then it turned through a gate-way to the right, rattled up a drive-way that lay under an avenue of sturdy trees, and stopped before a dark pile of buildings with no light, no sign of life, visible.

The driver jumped down, mounted the steps, and groped with his half-numbed hands for the knocker. By the time he had found it and sent a resounding knock through the building, his companion of the stage-ride stood at his side. A flickering light appeared behind the old-fashioned panes of glass which surrounded the door-way, and there was a sound of footsteps approaching. The door was opened a few inches, and a slip of a girl put her head out, and, seeing the stage-driver, whom she recognized, she said in a high voice, with a touch of childish impatience,—

"Why d'n't you come round to the other door, Lem?"

"Sh, Miss Carey," he answered, warningly. "I've got a visitor for you."

The door was thrown hastily wide open, a dog rushed out and barked, and the girl's figure was boldly framed in the door-way.

"A visitor! Who is it?" she asked, excitedly, peering out into the gloom of the porch.

The passenger of the stage stepped forward over the door-sill, into the light of the lamp, and said, with anxious voice and manner,—

"Don't you know me, Carey?"

CHAPTER II.

THE two stood in the open door-way confronting each other in silence. On the woman's face agitation and anxiety were clearly depicted; on the child's face was only the blankest surprise, with not a glimmer of recognition. The wind whistled around the house, and great gusts blew into the hall-way, sending the flame of the lamp dangerously high. The dog sniffed suspiciously at the skirts of the stranger, while the stage-driver stood in the gloom of the porch staring from one face to the other, and in so doing the identity of his passenger became clear to him. He drew his lips together as if to whistle, and said to himself,—

"So that's who 'tis. I might have guessed when she said she'd be left here."

He hurried off the porch to unload the boxes and trunks from the stage, for he knew they had come to stay.

The silence between the two who stood in the door-way was finally broken by the child, who said, hesitatingly and with half-frightened embarrassment,—

"I—I—don't know you exactly. I'm sure I never saw you before."

"Why, Carey, I am Hester." And the tears rushed to Hester's eyes as she stood unknown and unwelcomed at her own door.

This announcement of identity did not bring any warmth of recognition, nor any answering emotion, to the child's face. She only stood with eyes wide open, staring at the agitated woman before her, and repeated, mechanically and doubtfully,—

"Hester?"

"Yes, Hester," she answered, almost impatiently. Then, putting a restraint upon her rising irritability, she said,—

"Carey, don't you know your own sister?" And she made a movement with outstretched arms. But the child shrank back in evident bewilderment. Then Hester asked, sorrowfully,—

"Carey, is there any one about the place who would remember and recognize me?"

As she spoke, a door at the far end of the big hall was hastily opened, and a voice called out,—

"Carey, who're you talkin' to? Why don't you shut the door? you're lettin' all the rain into the passage. Come in this minute; you'll catch your death, an' be sneezin' all over the place."

The sound of this voice brought a brightening look to Hester's face. At the same time there emerged from the direction of the voice a stout, bustling little woman, round-faced and comely, with her hair combed down in an old-fashioned way over her ears and fastened in a small knob with a tuck-comb at the back. She came briskly down the wide hall, alertness and curiosity in every movement.

Hester stepped forward, and, with more certainty of manner than she had yet shown, said,—

"Aunt Jenifer, don't you know me? It is Hester."

There was a moment of utter bewilderment on the part of the older woman. She drew her brows together as if puzzled, letting her eyes sweep over Hester from head to foot; then a dawning look of recognition came into her face. She looked around in a half-flustered manner, and said, helplessly,—

"Well, well, well!" She continued to stare, until Hester said, half wistfully, half impatiently,—

"May I come in, aunt?"

This brought Aunt Jenifer to herself. She hastened towards Hester, put her hands on her shoulders, and almost shook her in her excitement.

"Well, well, well! to be sure it is Hester Brent." And she scanned the pale face, the heavy, drooping eyes, the tremulous mouth. As she did so, her positive assertion changed to one of doubt, and she faltered, "Is it really you, Hester?" Then she added, with conviction, "Yes, yes, it must be Hester. Thank God, you've come home at last."

"Amen, from the bottom of my heart," she replied, much overcome at the warmth and genuineness of Aunt Jenifer's welcome.

"But come," continued the older woman, excitedly, "come right in; you're wet as a drowned rat; you look half starved, an' sort of poor-white-folksy. Where's your trunk? Oh, Lem's got it.—Carey, you run out an' tell Lem he'd better tote it round to the other door, there's some one there to help him; it's dark as a pocket out front way;

an' tell him to wait an' get a bite 'fore he goes.—Now, Hester, come with me. There ain't a thing in the house to eat. Why d'n't you let some one know you were comin'? We'd have had somethin' killed for you."

"The fatted calf, Aunt Jenifer?" Hester managed to murmur, with the memory of the Prodigal still in the background of her thoughts.

"The fatted calf, did you say, Hester? Why, no: you couldn't begin to eat a calf. Now, a chicken would have been just right. But we'll scratch up somethin' in a jiffy."

She led Hester down the whole length of the immense hall, the flickering lamp casting a faint gleam on the line of dead-and-gone Jenifers who looked out from their frames on the walls. Every bit of wainscoting, every chair, every plank underfoot, was familiar. Carey came lagging a few steps behind, with the dog pattering along bringing up the rear.

The little procession entered the sitting-room, where a big fire crackled and danced in the wide fireplace without making any appreciable difference of warmth in the atmosphere of the room.

"Now come to the fire, Hester, an' let me take off your bonnet an' shawl." Caroline Jenifer always called all out-of-door garments "bonnet and shawl," no matter what their shape or cut might be.

In the midst of her bustling kindness she stopped suddenly and gazed vaguely over Hester's head at the open door, then back to Hester's face. Then she said, in a hesitating, troubled voice,—

"But where's Robert? Why isn't he with you?"

"Aunt Jenifer, Robert died two months ago, in Switzerland," Hester replied, in an even, colorless voice.

There was a painful silence, with only the crackling wood fire to be heard in the room. Carey was staring spellbound at the new-comer. Caroline Jenifer was staring also, for this last overwhelming announcement, coming on top of Hester's extraordinary arrival, deprived her of speech. She tried for a word or two of decent conventional condolence, but not one word could she think of to say. It was only by dint of unusual restraint that she could keep from showing open approval of almost the only considerate thing she had ever heard of Robert Brent doing. She finally had recourse to her former helpless ejaculation of "Well, well, well!"

At last she began slowly and awkwardly again:

"Of course, Hester,"—and she folded up with nervous fingers the garments she held in her hands,—“I might 've known somethin' had happened if I'd noticed your mournin'; but, you see, I never thought that Robert could die, an' when all's said an' done it's about the best thing he could do. I mean—that is——” she added, catching herself up apologetically.

"Oh, yes, aunt," Hester broke in, hurriedly, "I know how you must feel, and what you want to say. Some day I may be able to talk about it, but for the present——"

She left the sentence unfinished, and moved wearily to a chair, while Caroline Jenifer bustled hastily out of the room upon some em-

barrased pretext, glad to escape from the consequences of her own unguarded tongue.

Hester turned to her sister and asked, wistfully,—

"Carey, won't you come and speak to me and make friends with me?" And she tried to draw the child to her. "You were a little bit of a girl when I went away; you do not remember me, but I remember when mother first put you into my arms. Your little fists were all doubled up, your little face was puckered and red; I was quite a grown-up woman, and when I went away you were running about the place. You had the softest little yellow curls all over your head. What has become of those little curls, I wonder?" she asked, coaxingly, as she looked at the rough, short, yellow hair so like her own in color, but which stood up in rebellious boy-fashion all over the child's head. "And what has become of my little baby sister? Why, you are a big girl now. How old are you, Carey?"

"I'm more'n thirteen now, an' my curls were cut off when I caught in the cherry-tree an' John Cecil laughed at me an' called me Absalom an' cut me loose with a jack-knife that had scissors in the blade."

"And who is John Cecil?" asked Hester, glad to elicit any remarks from the hitherto silent child.

"Why, don't you know John Cecil? Everybody in Dorset knows John Cecil," she replied, in a superior tone. Then she went on, after a puzzled stare at the new-found sister, "But if you're really Sister Hester, where've you been all this time, an' why'd you never think of comin' home before?"

Hester realized how utterly she had dropped out of the old home, where almost her very name was unknown to this child; and she wondered if her mother had never spoken of her to Carey. She was about to ask this question, when Carey interposed suddenly:

"How old are you?"

"How old do I look, Carey?"

"Well, you look 'most as old as Aunt Jenifer, or as old as Mammy Becky," replied the child, candidly, after a close scrutiny of her sister's pale thin face.

"Carey, I'm as old as the hills. I'm lots older than Aunt Jenifer, or even Mammy Becky. Do you think you shall like to have a big sister to take care of you and everybody about the place?"

"I don't know as I'll like any stranger pokin' round into things, in' I don't need any one to take care of me. John Cecil keeps his ye on me pretty much when he's round, but I mostly take care of myself."

"And do you go to school, Carey?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes; I go when I have time."

"When you have time! What do you mean?" asked Hester, in consternation.

"Well, you see, I've the dog to look after; then I have to bait an' set my traps every day; an' I'm raisin' a young fox in a hogshead, an' it gives me a good bit of trouble; it snaps at me, an' barks at night, an' that brings the old fox prowlin' round, an' she steals the

chickens. Then I have to 'tend to the turkeys; an', besides all that, Bubastis has five kittens."

She wound up her recital in triumph, and in her earnestness she came and stood in front of Hester. The firelight played upon her eager face, and, although a gap of years lay between the faces of the two sisters, there was the same type, the same will, depicted; they were unmistakably daughters of the same race.

Hester watched the play of features, noted the lights and shades, and it seemed almost as if she saw in this child her own youth before her. She saw the same independence, the same fearlessness, the same will that would brook little or no control; and she wondered how it would be between them in the months to come.

At this point of reflection the sitting-room door was shoved violently open, as if by the toe of a stout boot, and Aunt Jenifer hurried in, her face a perfect flame of color, in one hand a savory coffee-pot, in the other a hot pone. Behind her came an elderly colored woman bearing a carefully balanced tray upon her head, on which were piled various dishes, while in her hands were spotless cloth and napkins. In her wake came a little black boy, bow-legged and solemn of feature, whom Aunt Jenifer called Jasper, and who carried a meat-dish much too large for him, upon which were the remains of a much-carved ham-bone.

"Now, Becky, you pull up the table to the fire: it's cold as Greenland away from the fire.—Come, Hester; you must be famished. You see, we had our supper long ago, an' I'm afraid there ain't much of a bite for you."

Hester took her place at the hastily improvised supper. Aunt Jenifer flourished a carving-knife and dexterously carved little shavings of ham, which she proceeded to pile upon Hester's plate. Carey, Jasper, and the dog were solemn spectators, and watched each languid mouthful which Hester forced herself to take.

"Soon's you're done, Hester, you'd better go to bed; you're tired to death. Your old room, of course, ain't fit to sleep in, it's been shut up so many years. You see, we don't use any but the main part of the house, and you must make allowances for the way things have gone to pieces. You know we 'ain't had a cent of money, an' if you hadn't come to the rescue an' bought the place——"

"You forget, aunt, it was Robert who bought the place," interrupted Hester, decidedly, determined to do full justice to Robert's one act of generosity.

"Well, Robert, then," returned Aunt Jenifer, impatient of even this scant justice to his memory. Then she continued,—

"Carey an' I'd have been tramps by this time; but luckily the place has been saved, an' I hope to see it look like it used to do; not that it can really ever be like it used to be." Aunt Jenifer sighed, and then went on briskly,—

"Lem's brought in the trunks an' boxes. I didn't have 'em taken up-stairs. I never saw such a sight of things in my life. I d'n' know how you ever find anythin' in 'em. I never had 'nough clothes to fill a carpet-sack, let alone a raft of trunks; but I s'pose

that's a fo'eign custom. You certainly do look tuckered out. I'll take you up-stairs."

Aunt Jenifer picked up the lamp, gathered Hester's furs and wraps over her arm, gave the heavily laden travelling-bag to Jasper, and they all started in single file out into the chilly passage, up the familiar stairs, and past half-forgotten doors. Jasper tugged manfully along behind with the bag, which thumped almost every step in the ascent of the shallow stairs, while the dog pattered inquisitively at Carey's heels.

They ushered Hester into a big, square room, with a faint, musty smell pervading it, indicative of long disuse. A fire in a small air-tight stove which stood in front of the open fireplace took off something from the chill of the room. A bright square of carpet covered the polished floor; mahogany furniture, with claw feet and brass knobs, stood against the walls; the high four-posted bedstead carved into griffins at the corners had tester and valance of dimity. The whole room, as seen by the light of the lamp, was inexpressibly sombre.

Aunt Jenifer bustled about, pulling out drawers, putting a touch here and there, and drawing together the long, straight, white curtains. Carey stood in the door-way, casting half-frightened looks from the big carved bedstead to the tall press against the wall; while Jasper, setting the bag down inside the door with a final thump, asked in an anxious tone, and not venturing into the room,—

"I's done fetched the bag, Miss Car'line; kin I go?"

And, without waiting for any answer, he made a grimace at Carey and vanished into the dark passage.

At last, when nothing was left to do, Aunt Jenifer kissed Hester's tired face, and, with the parting injunction "just to step into the passage and call if she wanted anything, some one would hear her if she called loud enough," she departed, followed by Carey, who neither bade Hester good-night nor evinced any interest beyond watchful curiosity. And Hester was left to her own jaded thoughts and experiences, to pass as best she might the first night of her home-coming.

CHAPTER III.

THE village of Dorset and the whole of Dorset parish could not remember a time in their annals when their chief interest had not centred around the Jenifers of Chapel House. Indeed, the Jenifers had been lords of the manor long before there had been the faintest sign of a village or even of any parish whatever.

In the early days of the Colony of Maryland it was the right of the Lord Proprietary to make extensive grants of land to whomsoever he pleased, and it pleased him to make a grant of several thousand acres to Daniel Jenifer, who was one of the earliest to come to the new colony. Any large tract of land constituted a manor and gave to the owner certain rights and privileges which made him a person of prime importance, and Daniel Jenifer was not slow to make the most of what accrued to him, and Jenifer's Manor became one of the most famous

tracts in the county. But it remained for one of his descendants to establish fully the glory of the Jenifers, by sweeping away the rude buildings which had been well enough suited to the early settler, but which in no way met the requirements of the rich later-day planter, the squire and chief magistrate of the county. So a stately mansion-house was built which was the pride and wonder of the whole countryside, and, as if still further to set the seal of greatness upon the family name and estate, by gracious consent of the bishop of the diocese and the permission of the vestry of the parish the new manor-house was constituted a "chapel of ease," for by this time the parish of Dorset had been established, and, as the parish boundaries extended on all sides as far almost as the county limits, the parish church was much too inaccessible for most of the good country-folk; so, according to the early custom of the Established Church, either chapels of ease were erected at convenient points of accessibility, or else the private residence of the chief land-owner of the parish was used as such, where the rector, his clerk, and the country-folk around would assemble and full church service would be held, with the attendance of the planter, his family, and some of the negroes from the quarters. For this purpose the largest room in the house was always used, generally the big dining-room, or even the ball-room, being considered appropriate. Upon the establishment of the chapel of ease upon Jenifer's Manor it was ever afterwards called Chapel House, although by this time Dorset village had sprung into existence and a parish church had been built on the hill overlooking the town.

Most of the Colonial mansions that were built in the prodigal days just preceding the Revolution, when the planters were rich from their immense yearly crops of tobacco, were apparently intended to endure against time and adversity. Chapel House was one of the best types of this prodigal Colonial period. It was two stories in height, and was built of brick, and with two wings which sprang from either side of the main building it presented an immense façade. A broad drive-way swept to the house and ended in a circle before the porch. This porch, with its roof supported by fluted pillars, was the chief abiding-place of the planter and his family. A wide hall-way extended through the house from front to back, and upon its wainscoted walls hung the portraits of the Jenifers for several generations back. Doors opened to right and left which led into lofty rooms. Upon one side was a spacious banquet-room, with carved white mantels facing each other from two sides. This was the famous chapel room, where in old days the church services were held, and from which the house and entire estate had taken their name. Upon the other side of the hall were corresponding rooms, decorated and carved in the same elaborate fashion.

These spacious rooms, together with the wide hall, formed the main building of the house, from which sprang the rambling wings, containing the offices, kitchens, and overseers' rooms. Beyond the wings on either side of the house were tall, grim, closely-clipped hedges of box, which formed two screened walks that led to and enclosed an old-fashioned garden, while beyond the garden and stretching away on all sides to the distant woods were vast tobacco-fields, dotted over with queer,

top-heavy tobacco barns. Altogether Jenifer's Manor was a most imposing domain when, in the natural order of things, it descended in an unbroken line to Hester's father. This was just before the hot breath of the Rebellion had shrivelled the fortunes and families of the South. Daniel Jenifer was an only son, and, in accordance with the custom among the rich portion of the Maryland gentry of that day, he had been sent to Europe to receive his education; although as to the daughters of the house the mother-country was considered quite good enough for their education. Accordingly, while Daniel was in Europe, Caroline Jenifer, the only daughter, was reared and educated on the plantation. When Daniel came back from Europe, the earliest mutterings, which for a number of years preceded the Rebellion, were just beginning to be heard. He was soon drawn into the stormy controversies and dissensions of the times, and because of the prominence of his family and the stand he took upon the issues of the hour he was sent to the Legislature at Annapolis, whence he hurled some most impassioned and bitter speeches upon the burning question of the day. It was at this time that his father died and he succeeded to the estate, and almost simultaneously he met and fell in love with Hester Carey, whom he shortly brought home a bride to Chapel House.

Immediately after this there swept over the country the first organized effort and failure for the freedom of the slaves, followed by the fate of its leader. Some months later Hester opened her eyes upon the world, and in after-years she always maintained that her stormy and wilful temper was owing in part to the times in which she was born; that no child could have been tranquil, born amidst strife and excitement, with the guns of Sumter echoing in her baby ears, and with storm and stress around her on the plantation.

When Maryland at last refused to follow her sister States in secession, Daniel Jenifer threw down the gauntlet, and in a bitter and ringing speech denounced the Legislature for cowardice, and flung himself out of the Assembly hall in hot passion. After this, events followed thick and fast. Daniel hurriedly tried to put his affairs on the plantation in order, and with kisses from his baby girl, blessings from his young wife, and suspicious and lowering looks from the negroes on the place, he turned his back on his home and went to fight against his State and his flag.

Finally, when Appomattox forever settled the great struggle, Daniel Jenifer came home, broken in health and spirit, and proceeded to pick up the remnants of his fortune. In the course of time things adjusted themselves to the new order. The Jenifers had lost their wealth, but they had enough with prudence to live comfortably. As the years went by, Hester, from a spoiled childhood, grew into a girlhood which, if wayward, was certainly beautiful. Just as she was beginning to taste the first delights of admiration and power which her beauty excited both in the county and in town, a late comer was heralded in the Jenifer family and Carey was born. For a year or two after Carey's birth the entire family attention was showered upon her and Hester was left pretty much to her own devices; and when it was too late the parents awakened to the wretched fact that Hester had given

her affections to a man not only almost old enough to have been her father, but a man totally unfit for her,—a man who in his earlier days had escaped the consequences of a tragedy only by staying out of the country and living abroad until the story was forgotten. He had a record for reckless living all through the county, and not even his family name nor his fortune could make him acceptable to any one save the wilful girl who stormily persisted in marrying him in spite of the stern prohibition of her parents. Colonel Brent was a man of the world, and knew how to ply the ignorant, vain girl with flattery. He was charmed with her freshness and beauty for the time being, and of course he won. Before the heart-broken parents fully realized the situation, Hester was married and gone.

Soon afterwards serious difficulties beset the Jenifers. The land, worn out with constant tobacco-raising, became worthless; the crops failed, and acre after acre of the old manor-grant was sold in the effort to stem financial disaster. Then, in the very prime of life, Daniel Jenifer died, and the worries of the plantation fell upon feminine shoulders; the mother and sister, together with the little Carey, were left to struggle as best they could under a load of debt, and as the mother felt her strength and courage leave her she wrote imploringly to Hester to come home and help them in their hour of need. But Hester could only reply in bitterness that Colonel Brent denied her the privilege of helping them. So the mother, utterly worn out, gave up the struggle and laid down the burden and her life as well.

Then Caroline Jenifer wrote to Colonel Brent, and characteristically told him, in blunt language, and without mincing matters, that the Jenifer estate was about to be sold under the hammer; that Carey and herself were homeless and were about to leave Chapel House unless he should come to the rescue and buy in the place. She also told him that Hester had been left guardian of Carey, and she hoped that he would be man enough to allow her to assume the guardianship; and she added tersely a few plain remarks on Colonel Brent's past behavior. Upon the receipt of this letter, Colonel Brent did a wholly unprecedented thing. He bought up the mortgages and other outstanding debts and made a present of them to Hester, and he followed up this generous action with a still more gracious one; he died; and Hester, free and sole legatee under his will, came back, alone, weary, disillusioned, and forgotten.

CHAPTER IV.

THE few days immediately succeeding Hester's return home were rather uncomfortable. A half-suppressed excitement pervaded Chapel House, beginning with Caroline Jenifer and extending even to Jasper and the dog. Each one felt uncertain of the future, and no one more so than Hester herself. She wandered restlessly all over the place, visiting each well-remembered spot, recalling her childhood and girlhood, and trying to identify herself once more with her home. She spent many a wretched moment in the little burial-ground which lay

upon the crest of the highest ground on the plantation, overlooking the house and grounds. Here was buried a long line of Jenifers, and here under a wide-spreading oak-tree were the graves of her father and mother. Everything was unkempt and forlorn. Only a wooden headboard marked her mother's grave, with nothing but her name in rough, black lettering upon it, and a little apart from the others was an old stone slab, flat, and partly sunken, with name and inscription half effaced; but Hester could still dimly decipher "Anne Jenifer" and the single comment beneath, "She was so pleasant."

As she noted the utter desolation of the spot, and saw the desolation around her as far as eye could reach, a feeling of anguish took possession of her, which sent her hurrying away from the place heedless of the way she went, with eyes blinded and hands clinched, wishing passionately in her heart that she lay there in oblivion beside the others, with the recollection of her wretched marriage and the long years of separation forever blotted out.

It was in the stress of this feeling that on her return to the house a day or two after her arrival she encountered Aunt Jenifer, bustling through the passage with a tray full of salsify-roots. She stopped suddenly when she saw Hester, so pale and tear-stained, and asked, in an anxious and half-helpless tone,—

"What's the matter, Hester? has Carey been havin' another of her tantrums?"

"Oh, Aunt Jenifer, it's only—everything!" And Hester turned away, impatient at being seen in her wretchedness. Then, suddenly remembering how faithfully Aunt Jenifer had stood by her and hers, she added, in a half-wistful, half-apologetic tone,—

"I am so strange here, so much of an alien; Carey will not look at me nor speak to me. My coming home is a failure."

"Now, Hester, you mustn't give way like you do; an' you mustn't mind Carey; she's been allowed to run wild, an' needs a good shakin'. Just come along with me while I put away these things; I want to talk to you."

Hester followed her down the passage which connected the wing of the house with the main building. Aunt Jenifer pushed open a door, and Hester found herself in the well-remembered chapel-room where the Sunday service used to be held. But what a change from the old banquet-room! During her father's lifetime and her own childhood it had been kept sacred. The reading-desk, as she remembered so well, had always stood upon a raised platform just in front of the folding doors; but now it was pushed into a corner and was covered inch deep with dust. Nails had been driven into the walls, even into the carved cornice, which held ropes that were suspended across the room, from which depended all manner of things: mysterious paper bags, smelling of herbs; strings of peaches and apples in various stages of withered dryness; piles of beans strewed the floor, walnuts and potatoes filled the corners; while home-made soap, in every graceless shape and size that human fingers could mould, was heaped upon the marble mantels. Cobwebs festooned the ceiling, and in one corner was an extinct hornets' nest. As Hester, with one sweeping, indignant

glance, took in the room, a flush mounted to her cheek and a light to her eyes, and she could not help exclaiming,—

"Oh! what desecration!"

Aunt Jenifer paused in the act of depositing her salsify-roots, and asked, in unaffected surprise,—

"Desecration, Hester? What do you mean?"

"Well, aunt, I am sure you could have found some other place more fitting for these things than this beautiful old room, with its history."

"Why, Hester, where on earth should I keep my beans, soap, an' potatoes, if not here? This is the dryest, biggest room in the house, with not a dark corner in it." And Aunt Jenifer paused. Then, with a change of voice, she added,—

"We've been 'most too poor, Hester, to hold to the old customs of our family. I've done the best I could. Of course I know I've homely, old-time ways of doin' things, an' you naturally have your own ideas of how things ought to've been kept; but I'm only waitin' to give it over as soon as ever you're ready to take hold."

"Now, Aunt Jenifer," said Hester, with some heat, as she sat down on an empty vinegar-keg, "you must not talk any nonsense about giving up to me, and we must not begin at the outset by being sensitive with each other in little things. Of course I must necessarily be the head of the family, but no one shall interfere in your domain, least of all I. I want to put things back as they were in my grandfather's time. I want to make a place and a home for myself here. Carey, you, and I are all there are left of the Jenifers, and, please God, we must try to live in peace and harmony and be a credit to the old name."

"Well, Hester," replied Aunt Jenifer, doubtfully, "I d'n' know as I can fly as high as you do, but seems to me you're talkin' sense, an' I like your spirit. You talk like your mother used to. I guess we women folks can get along; we've got no men to interfere. I certainly want to see the old place look like it did before the war, an' I'll begin by makin' Becky an' Jasper move out the soap an' stuff, right now." And, as good as her word, Caroline Jenifer moved rapidly to the door.

"Oh, well, aunt, there's no such desperate hurry; my plans haven't taken very definite shape yet, but we shall need to make a good many changes. We shall need more servants about the place, and a horse or two, and competent workmen to repair and restore the house."

"Goodness, Hester! it'll take a sight of money to do all that," interrupted Aunt Jenifer, in a startled voice.

But Hester had completely aroused from the dejection which had had possession of her when she encountered the elder woman. The gloom and depression had vanished, a slight tinge of color came to her pale, thin cheek, her eyes lighted up with sudden fire. She got up from the keg, full of energy and life. Aunt Jenifer stared at her, and exclaimed, bluntly and impulsively,—

"I declare, Hester, you look more like you used to as a girl. I've been wonderin' ever since you got home what you'd done with your looks, you've gone off so."

But Hester did not seem to heed this unflattering remark.

"Aunt Jenifer, I am distressed about Carey. She is so wilful and unmanageable; she has the rough manners of a boy. I want you to help me gain control of her. Tell me how to begin." And Hester picked her way among the various kinds of produce which covered the floor to where Aunt Jenifer stood; and, laying her hands on the older woman's shoulder, she looked into her face and repeated, anxiously,—

"Tell me how to begin."

Aunt Jenifer thought a moment; then she said, slowly,—

"Well, Hester, you must be careful not to antagonize her in the beginnin'. Give her time to get used to your bein' here. Just remember that she's like you were at her age; let her alone for a while, an' it'll come out right."

"Where is Carey?" asked Hester.

"I saw her with the cat an' kittens goin' out towards the old overseer's office a half-minute ago."

"Then I shall go and find her. I feel as if I must begin at once."

"You'll spoil all, Hester, if you go at her in a hurry."

But Hester was already out of hearing. She had to pass through a number of empty, straggling rooms before she reached the place indicated by Aunt Jenifer. As she neared the dilapidated old office, she heard voices coming from the half-open door, and, pausing a moment, she glanced carefully in. Carey, with five little kittens crying upon the floor at her feet, was holding her pet cat, Bubastis, up by the tail, until the nose of the cat touched the floor. As she did so Hester heard her say, "This is the way they measured in old times, Jasper." And Hester leaned forward to look around the edge of the door. She saw Jasper sitting upon the floor, with mouth wide open and eyes rolling from side to side, in eager interest, while the dog, a few feet beyond, was thumping his tail on the floor in canine satisfaction. Carey proceeded solemnly,—

"If any one killed a cat in Europe, oh, ever so long ago, in the days when cats were scarce, he had to pay a fine in a pile of wheat as high as the length of the cat held up by the tail,—so."

Then, having illustrated her point, she let the mewling feline down into a normal position. And, as the cat rubbed about her feet in delight at its release, the child continued, in cut-and-dried tones, as if reading from a book,—

"The cat was said to be an emblem of the sun; an' in Egypt its eyes used to change with the sun; an' when a cat died the household went into mournin' an' shaved off their eyebrows." And then, lowering her voice impressively, she went on,—

"There's a temple at Beni—Beni—somethin', I forget where, where they made a temple to the cat goddess, Bubastis, an' do you know, Jasper, they went an' dug down under it an' found big, deep pits, an' what do you s'pose they found in 'em?"

"I dunno, miss."

"They found 'em chock full of cat mummies."

After this remarkable statement there was silence. Jasper was

entirely overcome. He rocked himself back and forth and stared at Carey, perfectly dumb. The dog, knowing that some climax had been reached, gave vent to several short, sharp barks. Some half-suppressed movement of Hester's betrayed to the children that they were not alone. Both of them craned their heads around the door, and Carey muttered, disgustedly,—

"Of course it's Sister Hester."

Hester came promptly forward, and said, pleasantly,—

"I was so interested in the cat goddess: did you name your cat for her, Carey?"

"I s'pose so," she answered, slowly and reluctantly. But Hester was not to be daunted.

"Where did you find out about Bubastis, Carey? I am interested. Cannot you tell me something more?"

"I d'n' know anythin' more," answered the child, quickly.

"Come, children, I want you both to show me all your pet animals; I want to see the fox in the hogshead," said Hester, trying a new tack.

"It's too far away," objected Carey, curtly.

"Well, then, come and show me where the turkeys roost."

"It's too cold to go out-doors," said Carey, promptly.

"I kin show you the roos' an' the trapeses too, Miss Hester," volunteered Jasper, as he sprang to his feet with alacrity, while the dog looked expectantly from one to the other.

"Now, Jasper, I ain't goin' to have you pokin' round my traps an' frightenin' off things," quickly interposed the obstinate child.

"Oh, well, then," said Hester, "never mind about it now. I will tell you instead all about some of the wonderful things I saw at the Hippodrome in Paris; you will like that?" she asked, coaxingly, hoping to engage Carey's attention.

But Carey's attention was not to be bought. She began busily to gather up the kittens and to put them in their box, remarking, gravely,—

"I haven't time to listen now, sister."

"Very well, then, Carey; but to-night, after tea is over, Jasper shall come in, and we three will sit before the open fire on the big settle, and I will tell you some wonderful stories, and I should not be surprised if I could find something in my trunks that you will like."

"After supper I'm goin' coon-huntin' with Jasper an' John Cecil," said Carey, decisively.

This was quite too much for Hester's patience.

"Oh, no, Carey, you'll do nothing of the sort," she said, quickly and sharply. Then, putting a restraint upon her irritation, she added, firmly,—

"After supper it will be too late for you to go out anywhere. Little girls and boys like you and Jasper and this Johnny Cecil must not be out after dark."

"Johnny Cecil!" repeated Carey, laughing out suddenly at Hester's speech; and she looked very wise and important. Hester idly wondered what had made the child laugh so heartily. She was surprised and bewildered to find her little sister so obdurate and so determined not

to be friends with her. But she made up her mind to succeed if it took all the rest of her life to do it, and to further that end she desisted for the present, and finally went away, leaving Carey, Jasper, and the cat-goddess masters of the situation.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER all, Hester did not tell the wonderful tales to the children that night. At the tea-table Carey had no appetite; she was restless, and nibbled only a bit of corn bread; she left the table once or twice to go and glance out of the window into the moonless, starless night; she had nothing to say when questioned by Aunt Jenifer as to why she could not eat her supper.

Jasper also seemed to be unusually clumsy in handling the plates, and was finally requested sharply by Aunt Jenifer to "go out of the room, and not come back till he could stop fidgetin'." The dog, too, was possessed; he stood about and wagged his tail, and if any one took the slightest notice of him he would caper around and give vent to sharp, short barks, until at last Aunt Jenifer begged Carey to take him out of the room and shut him up for the night. The alacrity with which Carey obeyed was most edifying and highly suspicious. Neither Carey, Jasper, nor the dog appeared again on the scene for several hours.

Hester and Aunt Jenifer sat and talked over family matters. Aunt Jenifer told her of her mother's last hours, and of her grief at not seeing her child again, until Hester's heart was wrung; and she in turn tried to give some explanation why she had never been home. It was not until the tall clock in the hall had struck the half-hours two or three times over that Hester asked suddenly,—

"Why, aunt, where can Carey be all this time?"

"Oh, she often stays in the inside kitchen with Becky an' Jasper. Becky makes a great deal of Carey, an' spoils her terribly."

Hester got up and left the room abruptly. In a little while she came back and said,—

"I cannot find Carey; Becky says she has not seen her since she and Jasper went to put the dog to bed. Aunt Jenifer, does Carey ever go out after dark? I heard her threaten this afternoon to go coon-hunting, but I never supposed she meant anything by it. Could it be possible she has gone really?"

"I think very likely that's just what she's done, Hester. I've more'n once forbidden her to go, but, law me, she doesn't pretend to mind. She loves to prowls round after dark, an' she always comes back safe before it's late. Usually John Cecil comes with her."

"It is simply terrible, aunt, that children should dare to go out at night or be allowed to do so. I never heard of such a thing before."

And Hester hurried to the front door, to look out into the dark autumn night. She was in a perfect tremor of nervous apprehension over this unruly child whom a week ago she had scarcely known.

Meantime, when Carey had left the dining-room with the dog, she snatched a warm jacket and woollen hood off the dilapidated hat-rack in the back passage, and hurried to the porch at the back of the house. She stood and peered into the darkness while she tied on her hood and fastened her jacket. The dog was close at her heels, and in a moment Jasper popped out from a dark angle of the house. The children, hand in hand, made a very straight and hurried line for the village, the lights of which glimmered sparsely just across the fields. It did not take them long to reach Dorset; every foot of the way, every stone in the path, every bush by the roadside, was as familiar to Carey as the objects in her own room; and she did not know the meaning of fear.

As the children, a good deal out of breath, came within the circle of light from the post-office, they were greeted by various people, who seemed to find nothing unusual in their appearance in the village at this hour. One or two of the men who stood on the porch had axes and lanterns in their hands and dogs at their heels. Carey spied her friend Lemuel, and, calling out in her high treble voice, said, "Lem, I'm goin' 'long with you."

"That's right, Miss Carey; I'll look out for you."

"No, I'm goin' to make John Cecil take me; he'll be 'long presently for his mail."

And Carey took up a position where she could command both the interior of the post-office and the road which led in the direction of Chapel House.

In a few moments a man rode up to the porch and swung himself out of the saddle with a quick, alert movement. He was above medium height, muscular and well knit. His strong, dark face was smooth and bare even of moustache; his features were as clearly and sharply cut as those seen on an old Roman medal. His eyes looked squarely and directly at one; they were keen, unsmiling eyes, with a touch of sombreness in their depths, which might easily change with any strong emotion to a sudden fire. His chin was square and firm, with something of obstinacy in its contour. His whole face, while in no way handsome, was one that indicated power and will. He was perhaps thirty-seven or thirty-eight years of age. A shabby shooting-jacket carelessly fitted his well-built frame; his trousers were tucked into his boots, and a pouch was slung over his shoulder. He presented rather a rough exterior, as if equipped for out-of-door work, but there was, nevertheless, a contrast between him and the three or four villagers who were gathered on the porch. There was a fineness in his face, a natural careless grace of movement, that marked him above the others. As soon as Carey saw him dismount she sprang forward and said, eagerly,—

"John, they're all goin' coon-huntin'. You'll go, an' take me? Please say yes."

And she hung on his arm and looked appealingly into his face.

"Coon-hunting, little one? Well, I don't know about it." And John looked at her doubtfully. Then, catching sight of Jasper, he said, decidedly,—

"Jasper can't go; I can't take care of two of you, and he's too little to take care of himself."

"Oh, please, Mist' John, lemme go," whimpered Jasper.

"Oh, John, do let Jasper go," implored Carey.

"No, Jasper can't go; it's too rough for such a little fellow. I can't take care of both of you.—Run home, Jasper, like a good boy.—By the way, Carey, does Aunt Jenifer know you are going?" asked John, suddenly looking at Carey keenly.

Carey promptly and nonchalantly replied, but without meeting his eyes squarely,—

"Oh, you know Aunt Jenifer don't mind, so long as I'm with you."

John did not question her further, but turned away to fasten his horse at the rack. He had ridden over from his place, which was only a little beyond Chapel House, and he would leave his horse in Dorset if he went coon-hunting, for horses do not enter into the account with coons; only an axe, a lantern or a pine torch, a good dog or two, and plenty of endurance and wind being the necessary equipments for coon-hunting. And this particular hunt was to be started in the woods surrounding Dorset, and would extend, no doubt, to the low ground a mile or two from the village, where there was a sluggish marsh stream with plenty of brier-patches and razor-edged saw-grass growing about it, and where the coon, if one were found, being semi-aquatic by nature, would be likely to take refuge if hard pressed by his foes.

The hunters, some five or six in number, were now ready to start. John went out into the middle of the turnpike to start Jasper home towards Chapel House, and stood and watched the stumpy, bow-legged little fellow as he ran whimperingly out of sight down the dark road. Then he turned with Carey and followed the hunters, who, with their axes, lanterns, and gunny-sacks, were making a sort of torchlight procession through the village, while the dogs trotted ahead with their tails straight out. They knew where they were going and what the game was to be; for the coon-dog has a peculiar trait of being supremely indifferent to all other game between the hours of sunset and sunrise.

Just after leaving the last scattered houses of the village, the hunters plunged into the still depths of the woods. The dogs ranged through the bushes, sniffing audibly for signs, while the men, in Indian file, trudged through the damp leaves and brush. The lanterns threw weird shadows of swinging figures across the shining boles of the beech-trees, the upward glow scarcely penetrating the tangled branches overhead. Carey kept closely at John's side, and even slipped her hand into his as the woods grew more dense. The damp leaves made good trailing, and in the course of the first half-mile one of the dogs that was ranging ahead gave a joyful bark and charged down a hill-side, followed by the hurrying rush of the rest of the dogs and the encouraging yells of the huntsmen. All the dogs caught up the "yip! yip!" of the trail. It was "hot-foot" sure enough. They wound themselves around and around the mazes of the brier-patches, splashed through the marsh grass, tore up hill and down dale, until poor little Carey, as she plunged through bog and brier, gasped out to John,—

"Stop, John, stop; I'm 'most dead. Wait till I get my breath."

John, who had never for a moment loosened his hand from hers, stopped awhile for the spent child to gain her breath, and, fortunately for them, just at this time the coon, finding himself outmatched in wind and speed by the dogs, turned and doubled, but to no avail. The dogs almost had him. Then, quick as flash, he ran up a sapling and swung himself from it into the hollow trunk of a big hickory-tree. The dogs gathered around the tree and broke into a loud triumphant note of "Treed! treed!" as plainly as words could have said it. In a twinkling the hunters reached the tree, John and Carey with them. One of the men climbed up the sloping trunk of the hickory and stuffed his coat into the opening. Then, with swinging strokes of the axe, the men soon brought down the hollow shell. From the opening as it fell shot a gray flash of fur, teeth, and claws that rolled over and over in a small cyclone of leaves and dogs. Carey danced around wildly in the light of the lanterns, exclaiming, excitedly,—

"Oh, what fun, John! what fun this is!"

Then, as the struggling mass of fur subsided and was picked up from among the dogs by one of the men, Carey added, with much gusto,—

"My! wouldn't Sister Hester have a fit if she saw this an' knew I was out here in the woods!"

John, who had been watching the weird scene before him, turned in surprise to Carey; for he had never heard her mention her sister in all her young life before.

"Why do you think and speak of your sister, Carey?"

"Because Sister Hester's come home; didn't you know it, John? an' she's begun already by tryin' to boss me; she forbade me comin' out with you to-night, so I just gave her an' Aunt Jenifer the slip," she wound up, triumphantly.

John looked down at her, and for almost the first time in his life he spoke roughly to her:

"Then, Carey, if that is the case, you'll go straight home again."

"I shan't do anythin' of the sort," she replied, defiantly, looking up at him in surprise.

For reply John turned to Lem and said,—

"Lem, I'm not going any further to-night; I shall take Carey Jenifer home; it is too rough for her to go on. Let me take your lantern, or we'll never find our way out of this confounded place."

"All right," cheerfully responded Lem, as he handed over his lantern.

John whistled for Carey's dog; but just then the dogs started another trail, and the whole pack was off like a shot, followed by the hunters. Without any further parley they went shouting and crackling through the bushes and briers, leaving John Cecil behind them puzzling his brains to find the easiest and shortest way out of the woods. He held the lantern in one hand and with the other helped the belligerent child to jump over the marshy places or to creep through the bushes as he held them back for her. He said, as they went along,—

"Now tell me, Carey, why you have deceived me as you did. I asked you if Aunt Jenifer knew you were going on this coon-hunt."

"I told the truth, John, when I said Aunt Jenifer didn't care when I was with you," said the child, sulkily.

"Yes, but you weren't honest when you did not mention your sister and that she had forbidden you to go out with me; and, Carey, you know perfectly well that Mrs. Brent is your rightful guardian and that henceforth you must do just as she bids you. I should never have let you come out to-night if I had known that she was home and had forbidden you," said he, decidedly.

"Now, John, you're goin' to get real mean an' take sister's part against me," said Carey, wilfully.

"No, Carey, not that exactly; but you are growing to be a big girl now, too old to range the woods and fields as you do. Your sister has come none too soon to take you in hand."

"But, John, you don't know how queer sister is, what queer, odd ways she has. She's so solemn, an' she's so thin an' old."

"Old?" repeated John, in surprise. "Why, Carey, she must be a good deal younger than I am." For John remembered to have heard about Hester and her marriage, and he wondered if Colonel Brent had come with her. His allusion to his own age brought about a quick change in Carey.

"Oh, John," she broke out, "the funniest thing 'bout sister is that she thinks you're a little boy; an' she said that Jasper an' you an' me ought not to be out after dark, an' she called you 'Johnny.'"

At this recollection Carey laughed and danced along beside John in great glee. But somehow her mirth did not communicate itself to him. He was, for some unaccountable reason, annoyed with himself for letting Carey come on this hunt. It struck him anew that the guardianship of the child had been rather lax, and that he was to blame himself for having encouraged her. Filled with uncomfortable misgivings, he hurried back through the woods in a much more direct route than the one they had rushed over helter-skelter an hour before. On reaching Dorset, the village was dark and deserted. The store was closed. John unfastened his horse, swung himself into the saddle, then held out his hand to the tired mud-splashed child, who, making a stepping-stone of his foot, sprang lightly up in front of him on his horse, and they turned down the road to Chapel House. The horse's hoofs resounded clearly in the night air, and when they turned into the driveway that led to the house the front door opened and a bright light streamed across the porch. Hester came down several steps, and called out, in a clear but anxious voice,—

"Carey, are you there?"

Carey jumped to the ground, and replied, in a slightly contemptuous tone,—

"Yes, sister, I'm here. I went coon-huntin', as I told you I was goin' to, an' John Cecil's brought me home, an' you see I'm all right enough."

Hester stood surprised, her anxiety and displeasure all vanishing for the moment at the sight of a man dismounting and approaching

her, with the bridle of his horse over his arm. So this was John Cecil, Carey's friend and companion, whom she had supposed to be too young to be out after dark.

"I hope, Mrs. Brent," said John, coming close to the foot of the steps with his hat in his hand and his head bared in the keen air, "that you won't be too hard on us for this bit of folly to-night. Carey did not realize that you might be anxious, and I did not know that you were here to be anxious about her, or I should not have let her go. But I've brought her back safely, and we promise not to offend again."

John paused for a reply, and looked up at Hester, who stood just above him on the steps. But the appearance of this stranger who seemed to have such an air of proprietorship and authority over Carey entirely overcame Hester, and she had not a word to say in return for his courteous explanation and apology. He waited a moment longer, then turned slowly away, with a slight frown gathering on his face. He was inwardly irritated by the awkward silence. He felt that his first meeting with Mrs. Brent was not very felicitous. He turned away abruptly, in order to cut short the situation, and, springing into his saddle, he said, curtly,—

"Good-night, Mrs. Brent; good-night, Carey."

John was barely out of earshot when Carey sprang towards Hester and exclaimed, passionately,—

"See here, Hester, if you ain't goin' to be nice to John Cecil you can just go away from here. We got on heaps better without you, anyway, an' I like him better than I do you: so there!" And the excited child threw herself down on the steps and began to cry.

Hester, who had stood in the same position ever since John had ridden away, turned in surprise at Carey's outburst. She looked down on the child in a startled way; then she stooped, and said, soothingly,—

"Carey, I'm going to be nice to John Cecil. I was only surprised. Come into the house, dear, and tell me all about him."

But Carey was not to be persuaded to anything. She rushed off to bed in a state of utter rebellion, and poor Hester was left bewildered by the whole scene, and by this strange, powerful-looking man who had ridden out of the night with Carey on his horse in front of him, and who seemed to have such a strong hold upon the child's mind. Who was he? and why had he impressed her so vividly? Her home-coming was even more strange and dismal than she had thought it would be; and she wondered if there would ever be anything in her life but bitterness and strife.

CHAPTER VI.

THE morning after the coon-hunt was court-day in Dorset. The circuit court was to hold its term in the primitive, red-brick courthouse which stood back from the village street upon a slight eminence, and, with its white wooden cupola surmounting it, was, next to the town-pump, the most important and conspicuous thing in the town.

Here the quarrels about boundary-lines, the cases of sheep-killing dogs, the disputes over county roads, were settled; here also, when the court was not holding its term, political meetings were held and lectures given, and, no matter what the occasion was, whether of justice or of a pole-raising, there was sure to be a gathering from all over the county. Every hitching-post, horse-rack, and fence in the town would be pressed into service, much to the benefit of trade at the store and post-office. Sometimes the term of the court would hold but a day; then all the excitement of the occasion would be compressed into a few short hours. The clerks in the store would not have time to cross the village street to get their mid-day meal. The toll-gate-keeper would have his hands full; he would snatch every spare moment from his duties to hang over the palings of the fence surrounding the courthouse, or balance himself back and forth on the turnstile leading into the building, trying in vain to keep up with the court proceedings, at the same time not daring to take his eyes off the turnpike, lest some spry countryman should run the toll-gate, to his everlasting disgrace. Even the doctor seemed to have fewer sick people than usual, and his old white horse and shabby gig would stand for hours hitched to the fence. There was no mistaking the importance of court-day in Dorset; and on this day in particular, in addition to court-day the county commissioners had elected to hold a meeting also in Dorset to decide upon certain measures for the new public road which was to be opened, and to hear the report of their engineer and surveyor.

Cold and raw though it was in the early November morning, the store porch was already full of idlers, and two or three elderly negro women, with their heads tied up bandanna fashion, had improvised each an eating-stall or booth with the aid of a board thrown across the tops of a couple of empty barrels, upon which were temptingly displayed bits of soggy hoe-cake and chicken fried in true Maryland style. Altogether it was a great occasion, and there was an unwonted stir all up and down the village street.

John Cecil rode leisurely into Dorset. He was to submit his report on the new road to the county commissioners, for he was the engineer and county surveyor; and he was thinking of the business before him as he rode along. It struck him as an odd chance that when he had surveyed for the new road during the previous summer he had found that the most direct line would run through a part of the Chapel House property, and when the commissioners had served notice upon the owners of Chapel House they learned that Colonel Brent had bought in the property, and no attention had been paid to the notification. Consequently there had been a long delay, and John had advised the commissioners, finally, to condemn the land, run the road through, and pay the indemnity.

And then, as he thought of Mrs. Brent, as she had stood in stony silence upon the steps when he had taken Carey home, he devoutly hoped that Colonel Brent would prove a more agreeable person to deal with than his wife had been the night before. For John Cecil felt sure that when the commissioners learned that the Brents had returned to Chapel House they would prefer to send an emissary to talk over

the proposed road with them. And then suddenly he thought of Carey and the coon-hunt, and an amused smile lighted up his face at the memory of the child's escapade. Then he brought himself back to the weightier question of bridging the river and filling in the low marshy ground which would become necessary with the opening of the road; and he drew out of the pocket of his coat the drawings and specifications, and, after fastening his horse, hurried into the office of the clerk of the court.

John Cecil had been graduated an engineer from the University of Virginia. Up to the time of his graduation he had been dependent upon an uncle, who had given him his education and his start in life; but as a boy growing up, and afterwards as a man, he had been restless and had chafed at his dependence. He had worked hard at the university and had been graduated with distinction. Contrary to his uncle's wishes, however, as soon as he left the university he started for the Far West, filled with all a young man's vague ideas of doing great things,—of building railroads, of overcoming mountains and streams and bending them to his will. But whether there was something in his Southern blood and temperament that made it impossible for him to get along in the bustling West, or whether it was that time alone would have brought him success, he himself could never decide. He certainly was not lacking in brains or pluck. But after a few uncertain years in the West he was called back to the Maryland farm to find his uncle dead, and himself alone, without ties, and the possessor of a comfortable though not extensive farm in the parish of Dorset. Then came the tormenting question to him whether he should give up all his restless ambition of doing something in the world and settle down in the country as a farmer, or whether he should sell out, take the money to study in Europe, and finally launch himself in the world. He brooded over this question for months after his return to Maryland, and the people in the county who came to see him found him very grim and uncommunicative, and finally dropped away from him and left him alone. They pronounced him a queer, reserved fellow, with uncertain moods, and they grumbled a good deal that two of the most important places in the neighborhood should have changed hands so entirely. For Chapel House was seeing its worst days at that time. Hester Jenifer had long since been married, Daniel Jenifer was dead, and consequently the place was practically shut up.

About this time there sprang up all over the State an agitation and clamor for better roads, for better facilities and communication with the larger cities. The community had awakened to the fact that, unless new roads were opened to the nearest centres of traffic, Dorset and other like towns would become dead and buried. This agitation brought about an act of legislature authorizing and providing for a new railroad which should connect a chain of small towns with the city, and which would run within a few miles of Dorset.

Here was John Cecil's golden opportunity. He applied for and obtained the post of engineer. He surveyed and in due time built the railroad, and during the succeeding ten years, from the thoroughness of his work, he became favorably known all over the State, and was

sent for whenever any important piece of engineering was required, and the years he had spent since he came to Dorset had been years full of the work he had fitted himself for. And yet there were times when discontent would come upon him overwhelmingly. He wanted a larger field, and he wondered why he stayed in Dorset: he had no ties there, no companionship, save that of Carey Jenifer.

This fearless child was almost his only friend. She never minded his darker moods, but slipped her hand into his with entire confidence, no matter how grave and taciturn he might be. She would come hopping and skipping across the fields to "spend the day with John." She had the entire run of his house and stables, and there was nothing she did not pry into. He taught her to set traps, he caught the young fox for her and rigged up the hogshead as a cage for it, he taught her the names of all the wild flowers and to know the notes of all the birds. She went hunting and gunning with him, and even out on some of his short surveying trips. But it had sometimes crossed his mind during the last year that Carey needed to have some restraint put upon her, that she was growing up like a weed. He made one or two clumsy efforts to make Caroline Jenifer take her in hand, but Caroline Jenifer was only perplexed and helpless and did not know where to begin. Therefore it was a great relief to him to know that her sister had returned; he felt that now there would be somebody in authority over the neglected, lonely child.

When he went into the court-house it was to find that nearly all business had been suspended, and that Mrs. Brent and Mrs. Brent's affairs were upon every tongue. Somehow it came upon him with a shock when he learned that Colonel Brent had died abroad, and that the widowed Hester was going to live permanently in Dorset, that she was rich, and that she had a will of her own, to say nothing of temper. And then he heard graver things said; there were dark stories and darker hints freely passed from lip to lip concerning Colonel Brent's life; and he turned away impatiently from the gossip that was rife. It annoyed him keenly to think that the private affairs of the Jenifers and Brents were being bandied about among these men. It was long before he could bring any one to business, and the morning was well advanced before the commissioners were ready to consider his report. During the discussion that followed he reminded them that they now had an opportunity of sending a notice directly to Mrs. Brent that the proposed road would run through her property. The commissioners, of course, suggested that John should be authorized to see Mrs. Brent in person and then report to them. But John promptly insisted that the usual formal notice served upon her would be more satisfactory all around; for there still remained with him a vivid picture of the stony woman he had encountered the night before, and he had no taste for a second interview. He wondered how the two sisters would get along together; and, remembering what he had heard of Mrs. Brent's strong will and what he knew of the wilful Carey, he said, involuntarily,—

"Poor things!"

CHAPTER VII.

MEANTIME, for a day or two after Carey's outburst, Hester was in a state of absolute perplexity. She felt that the child's behavior towards her was utterly unwarranted; she could not understand the all-powerful influence of this John Cecil, whom she could not remember ever to have heard of before. She knew that she had been rude to him the night of the coon-hunt, but it had been entirely unintentional. She had so fully expected to see a boy of Jasper's size, that when this plain-featured, strong-looking man had ridden up and deposited Carey and accosted her with so much ease and assurance, she had been speechless, and had stood staring at him perfectly dumb, thereby giving rise to Carey's childish absurd outburst and subsequent bad behavior.

She must know something about this man who was so important in the child's eyes: so she said to Aunt Jenifer,—

"Who is John Cecil?"

"John Cecil," repeated Aunt Jenifer, in a half-perplexed tone, while she stopped in the midst of her darning. "Why, Hester, don't you remember your father's old friend Worthin'ton Talbot, whose place is just beyond ours? He married a Contee, and he was also related to——"

"Never mind whom he was related to, aunt. I remember Worthington Talbot very well, and know the place. He was the Mr. Talbot who always went about with a pack of hounds at his heels, and who fox-hunted day and night. Yes, I remember him. Well, go on."

"John Cecil is his nephew. Worthin'ton adopted him, but he never lived in this neighborhood as a boy. In fact, he never was here much at all until Worthin'ton's death, an' then he inherited the farm an' has lived here ever since; an' I don't care what other folks think of him, he's the best fellow who ever lived. 'Tain't every young man who'd help an old woman out of a tight place without bein' asked; an' I tell you, I don't know what Carey an' I'd have done without him after your mother's death."

"Then we owe this John Cecil money, Aunt Jenifer?" Hester asked, in a constrained voice.

"Land sakes, yes, but 'tain't so much, after all. I knew the estate when sold would pay all creditors," replied Aunt Jenifer, in an entirely comfortable voice.

"How much do we owe him?" pursued Hester.

"I d'n' know exactly. I guess he's got it down somewhere."

Hester groaned inwardly, but she said aloud only,—

"And what about Carey and the authority he seems to have over her?"

"Well, when Carey was a little thing John was lonely, an' he used to come over here a good bit. Your mother was attached to him too. He was kind to all of us, an' after your mother's death Carey used to cry for John, an' so I had to let her be with him as much as possible. He's taught her all she knows, an' I believe he's the only person in the world she really loves. An' I think, Hester, you'd better enlist

John Cecil in your behalf; make him tell Carey to behave herself to you, an' she'll do it fast enough."

"I should scarcely like to owe Carey's toleration of me to the intervention of an outsider," said Hester, with some feeling.

She stood staring out of the window a few moments, then turned away and went into the chilly passage, where she gathered up her fur cape and hat, and, though it was late in the afternoon and the light was waning, she made her way to the porch and across the lawn, choosing to walk where the leaves made the thickest carpet. She rustled through them, stirring them up underfoot.

Everything was deserted as far as eye could reach; only the cawing of the crows as they swept across the dull sky and the rustling of the leaves underfoot broke the stillness. The bare branches of the trees were clearly silhouetted against the soft, yellow glow in the west, where the sun was setting behind a bank of clouds.

Hester felt a new life thrill through her as she gazed about her. It seemed to her that this was the first time she had ever seen nature with nature's eyes. She slowly crossed the unkempt, shabby lawn and the stubby field beyond. She jumped over the shallow stream which rippled over the stones on its way to the ice-pond; she skirted one of the old deserted tobacco barns, and made her way to the woods in the distance, to the old Jenifer woods, where so many of the trees had fallen victims to the Jenifer axe, and where many of those that were left were girdled awaiting their time. Now and then she stopped and held her breath to watch an alert, bright-eyed chipmunk scamper up a tree. Had it been Carey coming through the woods there would have been no sign of life among its denizens, but Hester, light of foot, quiet and composed, was nothing to fear.

She walked to the edge of the woods, where a straggling fence separated it from the turnpike. Everything was growing misty and indistinct in the gray atmosphere. A few red berries still remained on the bushes, and a wild honeysuckle-vine that grew over the fence in a perfect tangle was still clothed with leaves that were sharply veined and outlined with a rim of frost. At the extreme limit of the woods, away from all its kind, grew an old persimmon-tree, crooked and gnarled, with not a leaf on it, only here and there a knob of fruit standing out on its bare branches. Hester wondered if persimmons tasted as they used to. She looked about on the ground for a stray one or two, but none had dropped. Then she stooped and picked up a stick and hurled it with all her might into the tree. But what woman ever yet threw a stone or stick and hit anything? Hers went the way of all feminine missiles and landed over the fence on the turnpike. She tried again and again, now from this point, now from that, and she was so much absorbed that she did not know that she was seen very plainly from the turnpike by some one who was coming leisurely along. She made one final throw that was even more wide of the mark than the others had been, then she stopped, half vexed, half amused at herself; and in turning she saw a horseman on the road, who, she knew instantly, must be John Cecil, and who doubtless had seen her antics all the way down the turnpike. As soon as he

was certain that it was Mrs. Brent, he gravely took off his hat and rode on leisurely. Hester stepped to the fence, and, obeying a sudden impulse, half spoke, half called his name:

"Mr. Cecil."

He turned slightly in his saddle, and, seeing that she wished to speak to him, he turned his horse and rode back, and with his hat in his hand waited for her to speak. He stood so perfectly still and looked her so directly in the face that Hester wished she had not called to him. She began, hesitatingly,—

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Cecil, but I want to speak to you."

John of course dismounted at once and came close to the fence, and Hester, with more decision of manner, went straight to the point:

"I want to apologize to you for my apparent rudeness the other night. I was worried about Carey, and hadn't the dimmest notion that any grown person was with her, and I was startled when you appeared with her. I had rather expected to see——"

And Hester stopped. She could not quite confess that she had supposed him to be a boy of Jasper's size and perhaps complexion. John knew exactly why she paused, for Carey had told him that her sister thought he was a little boy and too young to be out after dark; but he replied, with merely conventional politeness,—

"Oh, don't mention it, Mrs. Brent. I hope you have given yourself no concern about it."

He waited, and, as she seemed to have nothing more to say, he turned towards his horse, as if to mount, then said, hesitatingly,—

"I fear, Mrs. Brent, that you do not know how far you are from Chapel House and how soon it will be dark."

"Thank you for your warning: I will turn back at once. I was trying to knock off some persimmons when you rode by, and I have stayed out rather later than I expected. I won't detain you. Good-night." And Hester turned at once from the fence and stepped back into the shadow of the woods.

John mounted his horse reluctantly. He felt that he ought not to let this woman go back alone through the woods and across the deserted fields, and yet he had no desire for a *tête-à-tête* walk with her. Besides, there was a five-barred fence between them and no gate within half a mile, and he was hampered by a horse. He turned to look after her once again, but it was already too dark to distinguish her figure in its black gown among the trees. Suppose she should miss her way and wander about?

"Hang it all, I can't let her go alone. I'll have to go with her," he muttered to himself; and with rapid determination he rode quickly along the pike until he came to a place where there was quite an extensive clearing extending on both sides of the road, even beyond the fence into the woods. He quickly surveyed the fence, turned his horse into the clearing, then wheeled around and made a dash for the fence where it was partly broken, cleared it, and began to make his way back to where he thought he should come across Mrs. Brent.

It was only a few moments before he heard her coming. By this

time he could scarcely distinguish anything, so suddenly does night fall in the woods.

Hester heard the trampling of hoofs and saw a dark object loom up before her in the path. She halted, and wondered what a horse and rider were doing in the Jenifer woods, from which there was no outlet in that direction. She was startled, and wished she had not stayed out so late. She looked about with nervous apprehension, but she was at once reassured upon hearing her name spoken in a clear, decided voice :

"Mrs. Brent, I cannot go on and leave you to walk alone through these woods and across the fields. You must let me see you safely in sight of Chapel House."

"It really is not necessary, Mr. Cecil, for you to go so much out of your way. I am not afraid," said Hester, although as she spoke she could neither see the path before her nor had she recovered from her nervous alarm at seeing a horseman loom up out of the dark.

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Brent, you will allow me to go with you?" John replied, in a tone from which there was no dissent.

He turned with her towards Chapel House, leading his horse by the bridle. They made rather spasmodic attempts at conversation as they went along. Hester, who was quite unused to walking over rough places in the dark, stumbled more than once, and caught her gown on every brier she passed, so that she was continually having to say, "I beg your pardon," as she alternately bumped into her companion and stopped to wrench her gown loose from the bushes, until she was in a state of inward annoyance at herself.

They finally came to the end of the woods and reached the first field, where there were several bars to be let down. John proceeded at once to take them down, and wondered whether Mrs. Brent had crawled through them or climbed over them before; and Hester, suddenly reminded by the bars that there were no gates anywhere in the fields or woods in that direction, wondered how John Cecil had joined her with so little delay. So she said, inquiringly,—

"You also had to take down the fence in the woods just now, Mr. Cecil?"

"No: it would have taken too long, and I might have missed you."

"Then how in the world did you——?" and Hester stopped in the middle of her inquiry.

"How did I get over the fence, do you mean?" asked John, finishing her sentence with the utmost amusement in his voice; then he added,—

"Why, jumped, to be sure; how else?"

"Oh!" was all Hester said; and then there was silence while John put up the bars. And they walked on.

Hester was anything but pleased with herself and with her two encounters with this man. First she had supposed him to be a small boy. Then she had waylaid him, after he had had a full view of her efforts at the persimmon-tree. Then she had asked him how he got over the fence; and, bitterest reflection of all, she owed him money

and would probably be obliged to ask the amount. She could scarcely keep a tone of annoyance out of her voice as she talked of indifferent things, and it was impossible for John Cecil not to notice it.

He accompanied her across the lawn to the very steps of the porch. They had just stepped on the gravel of the walk when the front door was thrown wide open with a bang, and Carey, in a perfect whirlwind, rushed out.

"Oh, John, is that you? You've come to supper, I know, an' I'm so glad!" And the child dashed off the steps and dragged him into the light from the open door.

"No, Carey, not to-night," he answered, as he tried to free himself from her grasp.

Hester said immediately, and in the most cordial tone she could muster,—

"Come in, Mr. Cecil, and take tea with us. I shall be very glad if you will."

"Thanks, no, Mrs. Brent; perhaps some other time, if you will let me."

"Oh, now, John!" put in Carey: "you know you always used to come in to supper with us; but I suppose you won't ever want to come, now Hester's here."

A heavy frown came over John's face at Carey's speech. He glanced involuntarily at Mrs. Brent, who stood in the light, and he could not help seeing pain and mortification in her face. He noticed for the first time what a sad-looking woman she was, which of course he knew was most natural, as she was so recently widowed. But he felt that he could shake Carey with a will. He unclasped her hand from his arm, and, before the child could urge further or make another characteristic speech, he had said good-night, and was trotting briskly down the drive-way.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHATEVER of beauty Hester possessed was of rather an unusual type. A critic would have found fault with her upon various points; it might even be disputed whether she had any pretensions to beauty at all. Her hair was of that peculiar yellow color with not a touch of gold in it, yet not lacking in either light or life. It was thick and grew about her face in a vigorous, wavy fashion indicative of strength of constitution. Her complexion was clear, but darker than usually accompanies such yellow hair, and it made somehow a contrast that was noticeable and not entirely harmonious. Her eyes were brown, deepening almost to black in any emotion or excitement. The mouth and chin were firm and decided. The only color in her face lay in the curve of the lips and the changing light in the eyes. Hester had undeniably good points, but so much depended on the expression of her face that one could never be sure two hours in succession whether she had real claims to beauty or not. Sometimes, when the wind blew her

hair about her face and when she was flushed from a brisk walk, even Carey would be caught staring at her wonderingly.

But Hester never was conscious of any attention she excited. She seemed to regard herself as so entirely apart from personal considerations in the matter of looks that she might have been fifty, for all the interest she took in herself.

She was eager in her desire to settle up the debts of the Jenifers, and she determined to send for Mr. Willetts, her lawyer, or rather Colonel Brent's lawyer. She had had from him only one or two scant business letters which had followed his announcement that she received everything under her husband's will. She remembered with uneasiness that she had never seen a copy of the will, and she could not rid herself of an uncomfortable idea that things were too smooth to be real.

In the first place, the more she thought of it the more unnatural it seemed that Colonel Brent should have expressed so positive a wish to be buried at St. Moritz, instead of in the family vault at Brent, where all the rest of his people were buried. Mr. Willetts might have received private instructions from him which would perhaps come upon her as an after-clap and cause her annoyance and trouble. There might be conditions concerning Brent which she would be obliged to fulfil. She remembered that the only time she had visited Brent, which was situated in a distant county, she had shrunk as she crossed its threshold; for Colonel Brent had regaled her young ears with wild tales of the reckless life the Brent men had led, and she particularly remembered the details of a tragedy which had occurred during the slave days on the plantation in which Colonel Brent had participated. And she hoped that she would never have to set foot within the Brent domain again as long as she lived.

Decidedly she must see Mr. Willetts and learn all about her husband's property; and she must gather up all the Jenifer debts and pay them at once. She did not feel sure since Aunt Jenifer's disclosure of the debt to John Cecil that there might not be a debt or a bill lurking in the pocket of every villager in Dorset.

She wrote to Mr. Willetts asking him to come to Chapel House at as early a date as he could conveniently set; and she requested him to bring with him a copy of Colonel Brent's will.

Meantime, that day's mail brought her the notification from the county commissioners of the new public road which they proposed to run through her property. She was up in arms at once at the idea, and she hurried off to hunt up Aunt Jenifer, whom she found in the sitting-room with Carey. She began upon the question before she had closed the door.

"Aunt Jenifer, have you ever heard anything about a new road that is to run through our place?" And Hester held out the printed sheet of paper she held in her hand.

Aunt Jenifer glanced over it through her spectacles.

"Oh, yes; I got one like that last summer, but I just burnt it up an' said nothin' about it."

Carey had pricked up her ears at the mention of a road, and she put in a word:

"Oh! that must be John's road that I helped him survey," she said, with an important air.

"John's road?" exclaimed Hester. "Do you mean to tell me that Mr. John Cecil dares to run a road through this property? What has he to do with it, I'd like to know?"

"Well, sister, John's the county engineer, an' he has a heap to do with it, I reckon."

Immediately Hester wrote a note to John Cecil, asking if he would kindly give her a few minutes of his time as soon as he could; for Hester was always a person of impulse and was impatient of waiting for anything. This note she gave to Jasper to take over to John's place.

When dinner was well over and the afternoon was half gone, Jasper came back and announced, with solemn importance,—

"Mist' Cecil's comp'ments to Mis' Brent, an' he'll do hisself the pleasure of callin' this af'noon."

Thereupon Carey stationed herself at the window to watch for John's coming, while Hester hoped that her determined little sister did not mean to stay for the interview. But she knew that if she should hint that she did not want Carey it would be quite enough to secure her company for the whole afternoon.

Quite late in the day John rode up, and, turning his horse over to Jasper, was immediately welcomed by Carey on the porch. She ushered him in with the remark,—

"We're all in the sittin'-room, waitin' for you, John. Come along."

As John entered, he was surprised at the change in the room. There was a different air about it, and yet, as he glanced about, it was difficult for him to know just wherein the difference lay; for the chairs and carpet were no whit less shabby, but there was a bear-skin rug in front of the open fire, and a cosy table was drawn up near it, strewn with the current periodicals. Some heavy, queer-looking curtains were drawn back from the windows, which shut off the draught and made the room warmer and brighter than he ever remembered it. As he entered, Hester rose from a chair and took a step forward, holding out a welcoming hand, which John took and relinquished almost in the same instant.

It was the first time these two had met one another by daylight, and there seemed to be a mute surprise on their faces. There was a steady exchange of glances and a flash of mental summing up.

Hester with quick instinct knew that he was a man of strong intellect and character. There was something direct and uncompromising about him. He was not handsome, but there was a simple dignity and ease of manner which she had thought could belong only to a man of the world used to every phase of social life.

John was in hunting-dress of corduroys and top-boots. He held his hat and crop in his hand. His keen, smoothly-shaven face, with its clean-cut features and steady, straightforward eyes, made up rather a strong personality. He stood a moment with his gaze fixed directly upon Hester, and it struck him suddenly that the difference in the room which he had noticed on entering but could not define was caused solely

by this woman being in it. He laid his hat down and prepared himself for Mrs. Brent's communication.

Hester picked up the printed notification from the table and handed it to him, and said at once,—

"I sent for you, Mr. Cecil, to ask you about this notification. I am not very familiar with the rights of property-holders, nor with the rights that commissioners would have to run a road through private property. I understand that you surveyed this road, and you therefore can explain it to me."

"It is very simple, Mrs. Brent. This road has been a long-felt want in the community; it makes a short cut from Dorset to some large and important mills, known as Burnt Mills, on the other side of the river. Our people at present have to go several miles out of their way, and with heavy hauling to do it is a great inconvenience."

"Why should you choose our particular property to run this road through?" asked Hester, with some asperity.

"Because your place lies right in the track of the Burnt Mills and would be the shortest way. If the road should go around your property it would be little better than the old road, and would bring it to the river at the most difficult place to bridge," John explained, briefly.

"And if I should not consent to this road?" asked Hester, significantly.

John shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly, and said,—

"Well, I think in time they'd run the road through in spite of you."

"How could they?"

"Well, they'd condemn the land, cut the road through, and pay the damages."

"Have I then no rights?" demanded Hester, indignantly.

"You could go into court with it, and you could probably get a restraining order, which would stay proceedings for a while, but ultimately you'd be beaten and have to pay the costs. I should hardly advise you to adopt such a course," replied John, dryly.

"Yes, an' you'd be called a nasty old thing by everybody in Dorset," put in Carey, who had been following every word of the conversation and who had noticed John's shrug.

"You may stay out of the conversation, Carey, if you please," said Hester, sharply.

"Well, I just shan't, then," said Carey; and she began to repeat aloud the nonsense verse,—

"There was an old woman named Hester,
Who did nothing but pester and pester:
So they tied up her head,
And put her to bed,
And told her——"

But Carey got no further. John laid his hand with no gentle pressure on her shoulder, and said, sternly,—

"Stop at once!"

Carey was utterly surprised. She looked up at him and encountered his stern glance. He added, authoritatively,—

"You are rude beyond endurance. Go, and let us finish our conversation in peace."

Carey without a word hurried out of the room and slammed the door.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Brent, for my interference, but I had no idea Carey could be so fiendish, and I simply could not stand it."

Hester was so mortified at the occurrence, and so surprised at John Cecil's taking the law so summarily into his own hands, that she had no reply ready; and there was an awkward silence. Then John said, half apologetically,—

"You see how it is, Mrs. Brent; we've utterly spoiled Carey. She has never known any restraint. I have thought her sayings were bright and funny, and I have encouraged her. She does not yet know that you are her greatest godsend, but she will know it some time, if you can only have patience with her: she sadly needs love and care."

"Thank you, Mr. Cecil," was all Hester replied.

Conversation seemed to be very difficult. Finally John made an effort to resume it by leading back to the previous discussion.

"Suppose, Mrs. Brent, you let me show you just how little of your land we propose to take for this road?" said he.

"I shall be glad if you can place it before me more favorably. I am, however, determined to dispute your right to come through Jennifer's Manor; but I must have time to think it all over, so we will not discuss it further to-day. I have another matter of business to broach to you."

Hester faltered and grew slightly embarrassed over the last part of her speech. John wondered what was coming now.

"You were kind enough to help us out of some money difficulties not long ago, and I am anxious to pay off all our indebtedness. Aunt Jenifer cannot remember how much it is, and so I am obliged to ask you to tell me the amount."

"Oh, you must not let that worry you for one moment, Mrs. Brent," replied John, lightly.

"But I must, Mr. Cecil," replied Hester, with decision.

"Certainly, then, Mrs. Brent; I will send you a note when I return home."

"Thank you, if you will."

John rose. Hester said, quickly,—

"Stay with us to tea, Mr. Cecil."

"Thank you, Mrs. Brent; I will go and make my peace with Carey first, and then if she will second your invitation I will stay with pleasure. I hope to bring Carey back to you in better temper."

John picked up his hat and went in search of Carey. No one knew where she was; no one had seen her. But he went carefully to all her haunts, for he knew them almost as well as the child herself. He finally came upon her curled up on the musty cushions of the old family carriage, which stood, battered and tattered, in the carriage-house, which place of refuge it had not left in many a year.

John leaned over the rickety door, with one foot on the carriage-step, and said, softly,—

"Carey?"

"You can just get out of here, John Cecil, an' mind your business," she snapped.

"Oh, come now, Carey, you'll forgive me, won't you?" and John got into the carriage and prepared for a siege. He used all the wiles and cajoleries that he had been wont to use in previous sulks, but it took him a long time to win her to anything like making up. Finally, when it was almost dark, he persuaded her to go with him to see the fox. Before they returned to the house, he touched slightly upon graver things. He told her how alone in the world she and her sister were, and that if they did not become friends he should feel that Chapel House would be a place that he should not care to visit. This carried more weight than anything else he could have said. Carey did not talk much, nor try to argue with him. She was very subdued. She put her hand in his and meekly went back to the house.

The sitting-room was bright. The tea-table was laid at one end, the lamps were lighted and the curtains drawn. Hester was sitting before the fire. She was thinking that although she had shed the old troubles there seemed to be a crop of new ones springing up. Here was this controversy about the road; she would have to fight the commissioners, the community, and John Cecil, to say nothing of John Cecil's satellite, Carey. And what was she going to do about it?

Just then John and Carey came into the room. Carey, in a reluctant, shamefaced way, went slowly around in front of her sister and said,—

"John wants me to say somethin' nice to you, sister, but I d'n' know what I'm to say."

Hester put out her hand and drew Carey to her and said,—

"Why can't you like me just a little bit, Carey?"

"Well, p'raps I can if you'll gimme lots of time." And the child hung her head and glanced out sideways at John to see if she were meeting his approval. But he would not help her any. Then, as if some sudden idea had come into her head, she continued,—

"I don't understand it one bit, Hester; you ain't been here more'n a month, an' yet already Mammy Becky, an' Jasper, an' the dog, an' Aunt Jenifer, just fairly dote on you an' think there ain't anythin' good enough for you. An' now here's John. I can see as plain as can be that he's goin' to be just as silly about you as all the rest are; and I wonder why 'tis," said the child, with engaging candor, as she looked at her sister's face in the firelight.

There was silence so intense that one could almost hear it. Neither John nor Hester moved a muscle or quivered an eyelash. John stood by the mantel, utterly quiet, but he was wondering what was to be done with Carey's incorrigible tongue. A fortunate diversion came, however. Aunt Jenifer bustled into the room, followed by Becky carrying some hot dishes, and Jasper announced, with a scrape of his foot,—

"Please to come to supper."

For a time, at least, Carey's speech was buried in oblivion.

CHAPTER IX.

A FEW days later John Cecil sent Hester a courteous statement of the sums of money he had loaned the Jenifers, and she was surprised to learn how far back they dated. She carefully informed herself of the rates of interest usually obtaining in that region, and drew a cheque for the full amount. She was a little uneasy about drawing out so large a sum without knowing definitely how her property stood, and she was greatly relieved when a prompt acknowledgment came from him. She continued to hear nothing from Mr. Willetts. He neither came to Chapel House nor had he replied to her letter.

She wondered whether there was some hitch in settling up her husband's estate, or whether Mr. Willetts was slippery and was avoiding a personal interview. She determined to go to town if she did not hear from him speedily. She grew more and more impatient as November gave place to December and it drew near Christmas-time.

Winter suddenly descended in full majesty. The wind whistled keenly in the big, draughty fireplaces, and blew in gales around the corners of the old house,—this keen north wind which the Maryland negroes have invested with a quaint personality that they call "Hawkins." When the wind begins with a low, sighing moan that gradually rises higher and higher till it ends in a shriek, they say to each other, "Hawkins is callin'," and they hurry to make themselves snug, for they know that winter is upon them.

With the first moaning and sighing of the wind after December was ushered in, Carey moved her young fox into the shed near the outside kitchen. She drove up the turkeys to the catalpa-tree at the end of the back porch; she put away her traps, and made ready for the winter. Finally, when the water-butt under the eaves froze for the first time, and thick white frost settled upon nearly all the window-panes of the house, she announced, with great glee, that "Hawkins" had called, and that almost any day now John would come with his man and ox-cart to cut the ice on the pond; and as soon as that was done it would be time to haul the big Christmas-log.

She watched the first thin skim of ice beginning to form on the ice-pond, and was in an agony lest "Hawkins" should moderate his "callin'." After a couple of days she announced that the ice was thick enough to cut, and she was sure John would be over as soon as he had got in his own ice.

"Has Mr. Cecil been having our ice cut for us every year?" asked Hester, curiously.

"Deed, sister, John's done 'most everythin' for us: we ain't had anybody else. He cuts the Christmas-log for us, an' his men haul it to the house, an' John comes over an' watches it all night, an' we hang up our stockin's an' roast apples, an' he tells me an' Jasper stories."

Hester was finding out other debts to John Cecil which it would be no easy matter to pay off; they could not be met with a cheque on her bankers.

In a day or two, when everything was frozen as hard as even Carey's heart could wish, John Cecil appeared at Chapel House.

Carey was wofully disappointed because he came unaccompanied by either men or team.

"John, we're ready to be cut: where's the ox-cart an' the men?" she asked. But John replied by asking,—

"Where is Mrs. Brent? Can I see her?"

"What do you want with Hester, John? Ain't you goin' to cut the ice for us?"

"Come, Carey, run and find Mrs. Brent. Ask her if I may see her a moment: I'm going to ask her if I may cut your ice."

"Pshaw, John, Hester ain't got any——" but something in John's face made Carey stop abruptly in the middle of her speech and turn reluctantly to do his bidding. She called out in a loud voice through the half-open sitting-room door,—

"Hester, here's John wants to see you: come quick."

Hester appeared in the hall, and went at once to the open front door.

"Mrs. Brent, I have my men and team at your gate, and, with your permission, I'll have them cut your ice for you."

"I shall be very grateful to you if you will, Mr. Cecil," said Hester.

"Jasper," said John, turning to the boy, who was always to be found wherever Carey was, "run to the gate and tell the men to go to the pond, and I will meet them there.—You will come, Mrs. Brent, for a little while?"

"Yes: I shall like to see them cut ice once again," answered Hester; and they all set forth.

In a few minutes they were beside the shallow pond. The ox-cart was drawn up on the bank, and the men with axes chopped out the ice and dragged it with ice-hooks to the cart. When the cart was full, the oxen started with it and jolted and bumped it over the frozen ground to the ice-house. It made a perfect winter scene,—the gray sky and the leafless woods in the background, with the moving figures in the foreground. A little blaze of twigs and leaves, which Carey and Jasper gathered, made a spot of color and warmth, where Hester warmed her numbed fingers.

"Mrs. Brent, you are cold; you'd better go back to the house," said John, noticing that Hester was becoming chilled.

"It is only because of standing still so long. I am going to suggest, Mr. Cecil, that you walk with me over to the pines yonder, where your road is to invade our property, and that you show me the exact line and space you propose to appropriate."

"Certainly, Mrs. Brent."

John told the men to go on with their work, and he turned with Hester towards the belt of pines.

"Aren't you coming, Carey?" asked Hester.

"No: I'm goin' to drive the next load of ice; it's lots of fun to say 'gee,' 'haw,'" said she, intent upon the cart, the ice, and the oxen.

When Hester and John were some little distance from the pond, Hester said, somewhat abruptly,—

"Mr. Cecil, I am only just beginning to find out how much you

have done all these years for my little sister, and indeed for everybody at Chapel House. I cannot begin to express to you my gratitude and thankfulness." And she turned a pair of grateful eyes upon him.

John regarded her intently, and thought to himself, "How impulsive she is, and what a curious appealing look there is in her eyes! it is quite startling. I didn't know she was so handsome." He said aloud,—

"There really is very little to thank me for, Mrs. Brent. I have not been unselfish, I assure you, in any little service I have rendered the Jenifers. You see, it has worked both ways. I have been singularly alone all my life, and I don't suppose you can find a more crotchety, let-me-alone fellow in the whole county than I am; and if it hadn't been for your mother and Miss Jenifer and little Carey, I don't know what would have become of me. In doing little things for them I've worked off lots of my moods, discontent and general cussedness. On the whole, Mrs. Brent, I think the debt is on the other side."

"You are generous to put it in that way," replied Hester, gravely.

They walked on in silence till they came to the first stakes. At sight of them John said,—

"Now, Mrs. Brent, if you'll come this way I'll show you from this end where we propose to enter upon your land from the turn-pike."

As they followed the stakes along, John went fully into the subject. He put in strong plain terms the advantages the road would give the community. He pointed out how few disadvantages it would have for her. It would be almost out of sight of the house, and entirely out of hearing; all this part of the Jenifer plantation was the poorest of their land, nothing would ever flourish there save sedge and poverty grass, and the benefit of the road to Dorset would be untold. John wound up by turning to Hester with,—

"Do I convince you, Mrs. Brent?"

"Not a whit," replied she.

"But give me one single unassailable reason why you oppose it."

"I simply don't want the public to have the right of way through this property. I don't like the road, and don't mean to have it," said Hester, intrenching herself behind that ever solid wall of unreasonable-ness which makes women sometimes such exasperating opponents.

"Well, of course, Mrs. Brent, that is as you please; but it will not be a popular position for you to take in this community," he replied, dryly.

"I'll be a 'nasty old thing,' as Carey put it the other day," said Hester, in a half-amused tone, recalling Carey's remark. Then they both began to laugh.

"Well, I shall have to rest my case here: I've said all I can say in the matter. You are like almost all women when it comes to business," said John, with a touch of impatience.

"In what way?" asked she.

"Unreasonable," he returned, coolly, watching her face as he spoke.

"Yes, entirely so," acquiesced she, cheerfully; and she turned

around with her face towards home, as if to end the conversation. John of course followed.

As they turned, Carey met them. "John, when will you cut the Christmas-log? there's now only a week to Christmas," shouted she above the wind.

"We can go to-morrow, if you like, and if it does not storm," replied John, glancing at Hester for her consent. Carey promptly answered John's glance:

"All right, John. I'll be ready."

Hester said nothing, and after a slight pause John took his leave.

The next afternoon he came fully equipped for work in the woods. The ox-cart was again in attendance, also two men who were armed with axes and a saw. John looked not unlike a ranchman as he got off his horse. He was in rough dress and heavy boots.

"Where is Mrs. Brent?" he said to Carey.

"Oh! Sister told me to say she thinks she won't go out this afternoon: so come ahead."

"See here, Carey, have you been saying anything hateful to your sister?" And John bent a searching look upon the child.

"'Deed an' 'deed, John, I 'ain't said a word."

John stood considering for a moment. Then he turned and walked deliberately into the house and knocked at the sitting-room door. Some one said, "Come in." He opened the door and confronted Hester. She rose from her chair, utterly surprised at the sudden invasion of this stalwart-looking backwoodsman.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Brent, for this intrusion, but surely you will come out with us this afternoon?" said he, with frank determination in voice and manner; and, seeing that she was undecided, he added, as if taking her consent for granted,—

"Put on something warm: it is very cold."

Then Aunt Jenifer said, "Oh, go 'long, Hester;" and Hester found herself putting on jacket, furs, and hat, when she had fully intended to remain at home. In a few minutes they were crossing the lawn and the fields beyond.

The whole of that short winter afternoon they trailed through the woods,—the same woods where Hester had had her encounter with the persimmon-tree. Finally, after much ranging up and down, they settled upon one of the old Jenifer trees, already deeply girdled, which was to furnish the Christmas-log. The men set to work with their axes; they hacked and hewed it until it was nearly ready to fall; then a chain was passed around it and the oxen were put to work to pull it over. It fell with a crash. Then such a pruning and cutting off of branches, such a sawing of it to the proper length, and such a tugging to get it into the cart! When it was safely landed it was covered with great armfuls of Christmas greens, and the little procession started triumphantly home. Their faces were all in a glow with the exercise and the keen air. Carey said, emphatically, as she blew on her fingers to warm them,—

"We never had such a nice log-gatherin' before. I wonder why 'twas nicer than last year, John?"

"I don't know," replied John, vaguely, "unless——" Then he stopped; he had been trying to find a reason for it himself, and he thought suddenly that he had found it, as he glanced at Hester.

"It has been especially nice for me," said Hester, "because it is what I used to do when I was a child. It means a great deal to me to be in my own home again." She broke off her sentence, for there was a slight strain in her voice; then she added, after a moment,—

"This will be the first time in eleven years that I have spent Christmas in America. You will spend the day here with us, just as you have always done, Mr. Cecil?" she asked, warmly.

"I will come and put on the log and start the fire for you on Christmas eve, and drink a glass of eggnog with you, with pleasure, Mrs. Brent," John replied.

"An' stay all night, John, an' roast apples, an' fill Jasper's an' my stockin's?" said Carey.

John laughed indulgently, and after a few more words took his leave.

The next day or two Hester was busy making wreaths and garlands, and Carey was tractable enough to be willing to go with her to the little enclosure on the hill where so many of their kin were buried. They laid a wreath upon each one, not forgetting Anne who was "so pleasant."

On Christmas eve, just at dark, John came to Chapel House. The fire in the sitting-room, which had been so scant, was well raked out; then with the combined aid of John's stalwart men the log, big enough to fill the whole fireplace, was brought in and dumped into position, and in a few minutes there was a roar in the old chimney such as was seldom heard, and the room was brilliantly lighted, even to its remotest corner. It was the first time that Hester had felt thoroughly warm since her return home. The old-fashioned settle was drawn up, with a rug thrown over it in a vain endeavor to soften its hardness. Carey and Jasper took immediate possession of the bear-skin in front of the fire. They hung up limp stockings on either side of the fireplace, and each child was prepared to sit up just as long as stories would be told or as eyes would stay open.

The evening was all too short. There was a sampling of eggnog by the elders, including Aunt Jenifer and Becky, and there were stories told a plenty. John told all that he knew, and many that he did not know, until finally Jasper nodded over on the rug and was carried off by Becky. Then Carey went to sleep, and was with difficulty persuaded to go to bed. Aunt Jenifer blinked over her knitting, and at last slipped away to attend to the "risin'," as she sleepily explained, and John and Hester, left to themselves, drifted into a conversation that touched a wide range of thought and experience.

They talked of nothing personal, and yet there was such an undercurrent of personality that each drew shrewd conclusions of the other. It was one of those conversations that sometimes one remembers distinctly for years, without knowing exactly why. Neither noticed the time, and it was not until the parish bell tolled out the hour of midnight that John sprang up in consternation.

"It is midnight, Mrs. Brent. What must you think of me?" He strode to the fire to pull it apart as much as possible and make it safe for the night before he went.

"You had better have Becky watch the fire, Mrs. Brent: it will not be entirely safe to leave it as it is," he said.

"Yes, it shall be watched. Good-night." And Hester put out her hand, which John took for an instant, then hurried out of the room and out of the house. Immediately afterwards she heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs ring out in the frosty air. As she turned from the door after bolting it, she saw Becky standing at the end of the hall.

"Why, Becky, haven't you gone to bed yet?"

"No, Miss Hester; I thought I'd best wait up till Mist' John went. Ole mis' ain't here to wait up for you, an' I kind o' thought it looked better; though Miss Car'line said I was an ole fool."

Hester was startled. She stared at Becky as if she were groping for some idea.

"There, honey, don't look that-a-way; you're young yet, an' I don't mind waitin' for you an' Mist' John."

"Thank you, Becky; you were quite right to wait for me," said Hester, in a half-dazed voice; and she went back to the sitting-room, and, drawing up a chair, prepared to watch the fire all through the night.

What in the world had Becky been driving at? she wondered. Then her mind for the hundredth time went wearily over the events of her life,—her childhood, her marriage, with the repressed wretchedness, her homecoming under such terribly changed conditions. And then she thought of the last two or three weeks, with here and there a touch of real human companionship in them, and her mind quickened and roused up as she ran over the conversation of the last few hours. Was it true, as he had said half cynically, that we only get out of life what we are capable of giving or what we deserve? Was it true? If so, how hard it was on her! But what did Becky mean out in the hall after he had gone? She tried to find a meaning, but everything became indistinct and jumbled together; and she did not know whether it was reality or a dream when she heard two voices saying,—

"Christmas-gift, sister!"

"Christmas-gif', Miss Hester!"

It was Carey and Jasper coming just at daybreak for their stockings. It was their Christmas greeting to her.

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS was over, and each day of the holiday week which followed brought fresh interest and solace to Hester. She never remembered being so contented and peaceful.

There had been delightful brisk walks every afternoon, during which she almost always met Carey's friend, John Cecil, and they had had long and earnest conversations. Sometimes they discussed things

quietly and contemplatively. Sometimes they argued fiercely from opposite stand-points.

Once John asked what she had replied to the notification of the commissioners. She glanced at him half doubtfully, half appealingly, and said, slowly, that she had refused her consent to the road; and he spoke up hurriedly and with some vehemence:

"I am sorry to hear this, Mrs. Brent; for should the thing ever get into court I should be obliged to oppose you, and I should not like to enter into a contest against you."

As he spoke he turned towards her impetuously, as if to add something. There was a sudden flash in his eyes; then he drew back with a slight constraint in his manner.

Hester was puzzled and uncomfortable after he had gone. He always showed a little irritation whenever the road was mentioned, but she thought that there was hardly enough in what she had said to cause him to be so brusque and to hurry away. Then, while she was still disquieted over it, she heard from Mr. Willetts.

Mr. Willetts wrote that he had been away on a long business trip, and had missed her letters. He regretted that attendance in court would prevent him from coming to Chapel House, but if Mrs. Brent would make an appointment and come to town he would be entirely at her disposal.

Hester lost no time. She wrote, making an appointment for the next day but one, and then followed immediately on the heels of her note. She sat and waited for him in his office, and Mr. Willetts soon came hurrying in. He was a fine-looking man of at least fifty years. His hair was almost white. He had a quick, alert manner, and a pair of the most searching eyes Hester had ever encountered. He put out his hand to her, and said, "This is Mrs. Brent, I presume." He regarded her intently for a moment or two, then invited her into his private office. After he had shut the door and gathered up some papers, he sat down near her.

"Well, Mrs. Brent, how can I serve you?"

"Mr. Willetts, I wish to know all about the late Colonel Brent's property. I wish to know whether I am to have the management of it. In short, I want to see his will."

"Certainly, Mrs. Brent. But I must ask you one or two questions. Remember that my sole desire is to serve you to the best of my ability."

Hester bowed her acknowledgment.

"Mrs. Brent, how long were you married to Colonel Brent?"

"A little more than eleven years."

"You spent your entire married life in Europe?"

Hester assented.

Mr. Willetts drummed on the table; then he asked, haltingly,—

"Was there ever anything in the last years of Colonel Brent's life to lead you to think that he was—well—a little——" And Mr. Willetts paused.

"Insane, do you mean?" asked Hester, startled.

"Well, I don't know that I'd put it so strongly: perhaps unbalanced would be a better word."

"No, Mr. Willetts; Colonel Brent was no more insane or unbalanced than you or I," she replied, decidedly; then she added, "Mr. Willetts, you must remember that you are asking about my own husband, and, even though absolutely necessary, your questions are painful to me."

"I understand that, Mrs. Brent, but they are necessary."

"Well, then," said Hester, reluctantly, and each word seemed as if it were dragged from her against her will, "he was vindictive, and he was dissipated; he had terrible fits of brooding, and I was often afraid of him; but you must remember that for two years before his death he was an ill man, and not always accountable."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Brent, but was he jealous of you?"

"Good heavens! no, Mr. Willetts. I knew no men; I never even had women friends; Colonel Brent always contrived to prevent my making friends with any one," indignantly said Hester, fully aroused to the fact that she was about to hear something unusual and disagreeable. She added, anxiously, "Don't beat about the bush, Mr. Willetts: tell me the worst. Colonel Brent has tied up his property, or, after all, leaves it away from me?"

"No, not that; but in case you make a second marriage——"

"Oh! I understand," interrupted she, contemptuously. "If I marry again I forfeit the inheritance?"

"No, not that exactly; there is no reason that you should forfeit the inheritance even if you marry again; but there is a condition named in case you do marry, which I am at a loss to understand, unless Colonel Brent was unbalanced or insanely jealous of some one."

Mr. Willetts was looking Hester through and through.

"What is this condition?" asked she, her face growing white.

For answer Mr. Willetts handed her a document. Hester felt that she was about to receive a blow from a hand that had already dealt her many a cruel one, and which she had supposed could never be raised against her again; but evidently it could strike her even from the grave. She opened the paper with trembling hands and read the opening sentences:

"In the name of God, Amen!

"I, Robert Brent, of Brent, in the County of ——, in the State of Maryland, knowing the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of the time thereof, and being of sound and disposing mind and memory and capable of executing a valid deed or contract, hereby——" Hester skipped and ran her eye over the rest, but it was an unmeaning jumble of legal phrases. Her eye only caught countless repetitions of "the said Hester Brent" and "as follows, that is to say."

She looked up, and said, faintly, "I don't see anything, Mr. Willetts. I think I must be blind."

Mr. Willetts came to her side, and, putting his finger on a paragraph, said,—

"Read that."

Hester read. Every particle of color left her face. Her mouth drew in a hard straight line. She crumpled the paper in her hands, then dashed it down on the table and stood staring at Mr. Willetts as

if she were paralyzed. He, fearing that she was going to fall, put his hand on her arm as if to steady her, and said, kindly,—

"Mrs. Brent, it is certainly a piece of malice, but it is more melodramatic and ridiculous than anything else; you see it does not really affect your inheritance, and it is only conditional, after all, upon your marrying again, which you may never wish to do." Mr. Willetts stopped. He had spoken cheerfully, but his words sounded lame in his own ears, and their purport did not reach Hester at all.

"Oh, he was crazy; he must have been crazy," said she, in a low voice, as if to herself. Suddenly the tide of outraged feeling rose in her, and she poured out a torrent of words in a voice that was full of concentrated bitterness and scorn:

"I, poor fool, thought that I was free, thought that I could put behind me all that was hideous, that I could in time forget it, that I could with a free conscience and an honest heart take this inheritance which I had earned, God knows, at the price of myself, my life, and my happiness. I thought that I could put it to good uses and wipe out the infamy of his life. It is like the pounce of a cruel, stealthy cat upon a poor, bruised, crippled, half-dead mouse, that thought that it had got away, to find that it hadn't. It is like some diseased, misshapen, grinning imp who suddenly jumps out of a dark, slimy hole and says, 'Here we are.'"

"Oh, hush, Mrs. Brent!" said Mr. Willetts, distressed at Hester's fierce anger, and trying to stem the flow of her bitter words.

"It is an infamous will, Mr. Willetts; it is a piece of vindictive malice. You can do what you please with Colonel Brent's estate; I don't want it and won't have it."

"You cannot renounce it, Mrs. Brent. Of course, if you choose, you can refuse the income, but that would be utterly foolish. If you say so, we can go into court and perhaps break this will; but you must not lose sight of the fact that the whole thing is only conditional upon your marrying again."

"Marrying again, Mr. Willetts!" echoed Hester, with scorn. "I'm not likely to marry again; the bitterness of this thing is in the fact that any human being could be so malicious. Of course this will had to be filed and was published in the papers; of course any one who chose to look over the register or read the papers knows of this condition?" asked Hester.

"Well, after Colonel Brent's death, which of course was published in the death notices, not wishing to attract attention to it, I delayed filing the will for three months, as long, in fact, as the law allows. I saw no comment made, and it probably escaped notice. This was why, Mrs. Brent, I was anxious to delay any meeting with you; and you now probably understand Colonel Brent's motive for not wishing his remains brought at once to Brent."

"And I understand," said Hester, "that at the end of five years, if I am unmarried, his remains are to be removed to Brent for interment and no further condition is imposed, but if I marry——" Hester stopped, and then exclaimed, passionately, "I will not even name this other crazy condition. I will never name it to myself, nor to any

human being, and I will never fulfil it; and I say right here, Mr. Willetts, that if I should ever choose to marry again I shall do it, in spite of that shameful sensational clause. My whole life was shamed and ruined while Colonel Brent lived, and I do not mean that his shadow shall rest upon me now that he is dead." And Hester stood up.

"Now, Mrs. Brent, you are showing the right spirit. But you are not going yet: I want to lay before you various papers and some leases. Your property is a handsome one, and I must have some instructions about Brent."

"I can attend to nothing now, Mr. Willetts; I can, however, sign a power of attorney,—that is, if I can hold a pen steadily long enough to do so," said Hester, tremulously; for the fire of anger had left her suddenly shorn of all her strength.

"No, Mrs. Brent, you must sign no power of attorney. Go home and take care of yourself. In a couple of weeks I will come to Chapel House, and these other matters can be settled at that time."

Hester prepared to go. She drew down her veil and gathered up her furs; then she reached out across the table, picked up the will, smoothed it out where she had rumpled it, glanced down its length till she came to the clause which so outraged her, and deliberately read it to herself twice, until each stilted phrase was burned into her brain. Mr. Willetts stood watching her with an expression of mingled pity and admiration. He thought to himself that Colonel Brent must have been a fiend indeed to put such a condition upon this fair woman. As Hester laid the will down, she said,—

"Did you draw up this will?"

"No, Mrs. Brent, I did not: although I have managed Colonel Brent's property all these years, he knew that I never would have drawn up such a will as this. It was sent to me from St. Moritz just before his death. It is properly drawn and attested, but I have grave doubts as to its legality. I do not believe it would hold in any court in Maryland, for it could only have been conceived by a diseased brain. You might break this will, Mrs. Brent."

Hester grasped at this idea for a moment and looked eagerly at Mr. Willetts; then her face clouded over, and she asked, doubtfully,—

"I should have to go into court, and everything would have to be made public, would it not?"

"Yes, of course you would have to appear in court, and the greater part of your married life would be laid bare. We could, no doubt, get witnesses from Europe to testify to his unsound mind; but you must remember one thing: if you should succeed in breaking this will, you would lose almost all the property, for you would be entitled under the law to only your dower and half the personal estate. On the whole, I should scarcely advise taking it into court. However, that is for you to decide."

Hester remained silent for a time in consideration; then she arose with a sigh.

"I shall have to think over this," she said; and she slowly prepared to leave the office. Mr. Willetts put her into a cab, and, with a

sympathetic pressure of the hand, admonished her "not to worry." And with her mind dazed and her spirit crushed she made her homeward journey.

CHAPTER XI.

THE long, jolting ride in the stage was like the rack and thumb-screw to Hester. Every nerve was strained to its utmost tension; her mind raced and hurried from one possibility to another; she was thankful that she was under cover of night, for she knew that her face twitched, that her hands alternately pinched up the tufts of fur on the shabby old buffalo robe and were pressed against her lips to keep back half-uttered words. She was entirely unnerved; and through it all Lemuel on the front seat kept up a continual and lively flow of talk; he retailed all the doings and sayings of Dorset: how the doctor's white horse had gone dead lame; how a tramp had come through the village the day before and had scared all the women-folks; how the parson had christened little Mrs. Baker's baby Jonathan instead of Joanna; how some one had heard that Mrs. Brent wanted to buy a horse,—she was welcome to any belonging to the stage line; and he proceeded to enumerate and dilate upon the traits of his various equines until Hester nearly went wild. But he was all unconscious of this, and kept on with his monologue until he set her down at her own door.

As soon as Hester entered the house she forced herself to assume a calmness which was at variance with the conflict of anger, mortification, and sense of outrage which had possession of her. She entered the sitting-room, looking very white and tired: her eyes had deepened to almost black with the fire that burned in them. Aunt Jenifer noticed something unusual about her, and said at once,—

"You've found out somethin' in town to-day, I know by your looks. That lawyer's just gone an' pocketed your money."

"I wish to heaven he had!" exclaimed Hester.

"You read the will?"

"Yes, I read the will."

"An' everythin' is all right?" queried Aunt Jenifer, anxiously.

"Everything is all right. The will was a masterpiece. It was full of 'sai'ds' and 'aforesai'ds' and 'as follows' and 'that is to say,' and I counted no less than twenty 'Hester Brents;' sometimes I was 'the said Hester Brent,' sometimes I was 'my said wife.' Oh, I was very much in the will."

"An' what about Brent?"

"Brent is to be kept in the family; and the family vault is also in the will, with all the little and big Brents. I'm glad the vault was mentioned, for otherwise I might have forgotten it, or overlooked it, and sold it, or something," Hester said, recklessly.

Aunt Jenifer stared at her. She was puzzled by her manner; she had never seen her so hilarious before, and she never before had seen two such red spots burning in Hester's cheeks. But she said, complacently,—

"I'm glad that everythin' has been left satisfactorily. You're a rich woman, Hester."

"No! I'm the poorest that walks the earth," exclaimed she, passionately. Then, seeing the astonished look on the elder woman's face, she said, more quietly, "I am dreadfully tired, and shall go to bed. I don't want any supper."

And before Aunt Jenifer could remonstrate, Hester had picked up a lamp and was gone.

Carey came in, and asked, "Where's sister?"

"She's gone to bed; she's all tuckered out," replied Aunt Jenifer.

"Well," said Carey, evidently disappointed, "if sister ain't just about as queer as they're made!—to go off to bed without sayin' anythin' to anybody,—when we've got Sally Lunn for supper, too."

And without a word she made a bound up the stairs to Hester's room and flung open the door wide. Hester's hat and jacket were tossed on the bed, the lamp was flaming dangerously high on the dressing-table, and Hester lay on the floor, face down, with one arm doubled under her. Carey sprang to her and called her by name, but in vain. She ran into the passage, leaned over the balusters, and screamed to Aunt Jenifer, Becky, and Jasper. After a little delay they came running, bewildered. Aunt Jenifer was saying, "Land sakes alive! what's all this fuss about?" She and Becky bent over Hester; her gown was loosened, and water was dashed in her face. Carey asked, in a frightened whisper, as they failed to arouse her,—

"Is she dead?"

"No, but we must have a doctor."

"I'll go. Come, Jasper," said Carey; and the two children hurried away. They went out into the dark winter night and started across the fields, stumbling and running alternately. They were both entirely out of breath when they reached Dorset. As they passed the lighted store on their way up the village street, some one called out,—

"Where are you two children going at this time of night?"

"Oh, John, is that you? Somethin' dreadful's happened to Hester, but I don't think she's dead yet."

John grasped the child by the shoulder, and said,—

"Stand still, and tell me what the matter is."

"Why, Hester came home to-night from town, an' didn't want any supper, an' I found her lyin' on the floor, an' she didn't know anythin', an' her face was dead white, an' Aunt Jenifer wants Dr. Quinter quick."

"You and Jasper run home as fast as you can; I'll bring Dr. Quinter in half an hour." And John was half-way up the street as he finished speaking.

The children started back to Chapel House with half-frightened speed. It seemed as if they had scarcely reached home when Dr. Quinter's gig drew up at the door. John Cecil was with him, and the two men entered the lighted hall. Aunt Jenifer leaned over the railing and called down to the doctor to come up. John went into the sitting-room, where the fire was burning cheerfully and the untasted supper still stood on the table. He went to the fire and leaned against

the corner of the mantel, then walked to the door and looked into the hall, came back and threw himself down on the hard settle. There was a hurrying of footsteps overhead, and a banging of doors. Presently Carey came stealing down the stairs and into the room. John asked, gravely,—

"Is Mrs. Brent all right?"

"I don't know, John; they wouldn't let me in." The child sat down beside him, and they both stared into the fire without a word.

After what seemed an interminable time, there was a sound of voices and footsteps. Dr. Quinter was heard saying, in a bluff voice,—

"She'll do nicely now, Miss Caroline. I'll look in in the morning. Have some one keep an eye upon her to-night." And he hurried away.

Aunt Jenifer bustled into the sitting-room, and, catching sight of John, she began:

"I d'n' know what possessed Hester to have such a spell; I hope she ain't goin' to be one of the fainty kind. There was no reason that I know of for it. She came home from town in high spirits: she'd heard good news; but p'raps when she came to go over Robert's business affairs it brought back to her all his tantrums, for I tell you he just led her a dance."

Carey's eyes were opened to their widest extent; she was taking in every word. She inquired, eagerly,—

"Why, Aunt Jenifer, was there anythin' wrong with Brother Robert?"

"Wrong!" ejaculated Aunt Jenifer. Then she stopped short; she had caught sight of John's face, with its stern warning to stop.

"Go to bed, Carey, and don't ask questions," she ordered, sharply. She said to John,—

"Becky's goin' to stay up-stairs while I take a bite; then I'm goin' to stay with Hester through the night. I was a good bit frightened, for it was a long time before we could bring her round. I d'n' know when I've seen a worse faintin'-spell." And Aunt Jenifer proceeded to butter a slice of Sally Lunn and to spear a bit of ham with her fork and eat them while she walked around the table.

Carey could not be persuaded to eat a mouthful. She said, "I don't want any supper; I've got somethin' queer in my throat that keeps comin' up in a lump when I try to swallow." And she put up her hand to her throat to feel for the "somethin'."

"Carey," remarked John, "you'd better go to bed: you're tired and excited."

"I'm most afraid if I go to bed, John, I might miss somethin'," she replied. She loitered awhile, but, finding them both dull company, she finally called the dog and went away.

As soon as she had gone, John said, "Miss Caroline, had I not better stay here to-night? There are only yourself and Becky, and I don't like to think of you women here alone in an emergency."

"To tell the truth, John, I'll be mighty thankful if you'll stay, though I d'n' know where I can put you."

"What's the matter with the settle in front of the fire? That will do for me perfectly," said John.

Aunt Jenifer looked at it doubtfully, and then for a moment considered the cold, empty rooms up-stairs, where there were neither fires nor comforts of any sort, and said,—

"Well, if you don't mind, John; but I want to say that I didn't remember Carey when I spoke out about Robert, an' I always get so mad when I think of him. He was a bad man; he led Hester a dog's life, an' made her perfectly wretched; he never let her come home even when her father an' mother died, an'——"

"Hush!" said John, authoritatively. "Don't tell me anything about it; Mrs. Brent would be distressed if you did, and you may exaggerate or be misinformed."

Aunt Jenifer gave a sniff at the idea, but she held her peace and presently went back to Hester. Becky came and cleared away the tea-table; and the night set in.

John sat awhile and stared into the bed of the fire; and what pictures he saw in it it would be hard to say. He got up every now and then and took a turn up and down the room; then he would stare again into the fire.

So Mrs. Brent had been unhappy. She was not mourning the loss of Colonel Brent, after all; her black garb and sad, depressed look had only the conventional meaning. He remembered to have heard ill reports of Colonel Brent's character; then, whimsically enough, he thought of some of the traits of the Jenifer men and women which had not been entirely lovable. He remembered to have heard that Mrs. Brent at the time of her marriage had been very wilful and disobedient and had almost broken her parents' hearts. Perhaps she had not been altogether blameless in her married life. The blame, of course, was laid at Colonel Brent's door, but there were nearly always two sides; she certainly had a will of her own, as was evidenced by the stand she had taken about the road; she had an independence of thought and action unusual in a woman. Yet, on the other hand, there was sometimes an uncertainty about her, an air of fear and apprehension, that he had puzzled over. She had seemed timid at his companionship, as if she were unused to having friends with whom she could talk freely. Once or twice there had flashed into her eyes a shrinking look as she had turned them upon him, which had had a singular effect upon him. It was as if they had said, "Don't strike me;" and as John thought of this he got up and restlessly walked about the room.

Nothing had ever appealed to him in all his life as this strange, cowed look in Hester Brent's eyes had done. He remembered that only the other night when he had spoken rather vehemently about opposing her in the contest over the road she had turned upon him this half-frightened look of appeal, and he had been so stirred by it that he had hurried away; and wherever he had looked he had seen her eyes,—those strange, expressive eyes, which sometimes looked so soft and genial that their color was almost golden, but which perhaps the very next moment grew dark and intense with some feeling or emotion

of which he had no inkling. Sometimes her eyes could be stony, as they had been the first night he met her, the night he had brought Carey home from the coon-hunt; and they could be apologetic, too, as they had been out by the persimmon-tree in the woods. And then he had seen a joyous, girlish look of innocence in them which seemed to lift a burden of years from her face. This had been on the day they gathered the Christmas greens.

Then suddenly John brought himself up with a jerk. Considering that Mrs. Brent was a stranger and a newly-made widow, and that it was only a little over two months since he had met her, he felt that he was being rather too minute in analyzing her eyes; he smiled grimly as the old lines sprang to his lips,—

“In watching and pursuing,
The light that lies in woman’s eyes
Has been my heart’s undoing.”

“Not that, exactly,” he said to himself, “but——” and he got up and kicked the log on the fire until it shot up into a bright flame and sent out a shower of sparks. Then he settled back into a chair.

But almost immediately his mind harked back to the same theme. Aunt Jenifer had said that Colonel Brent had led his wife a dog’s life. She had spoken of his tantrums; there never was any half-way reserve in Caroline Jenifer’s words: they were always bludgeons; she doubtless exaggerated, he reflected; but then he had heard men speak severely of Colonel Brent’s earlier years, and a couple of months ago, when Mrs. Brent had returned, talk had been revived in Dorset and some dark stories had been hinted at. Perhaps Colonel Brent had ill-used Mrs. Brent; perhaps he had struck her. The thought was intolerable; a wild feeling of rage surged through him. He thrust his hands down deep into his pockets and muttered,—

“By God! to think of a woman tied to such a brute! No wonder there is sometimes a cowed look in her eyes.” Then he found himself thinking of her eyes again; he saw them in the glow of the fire, in the depths of the window-curtains; they looked up from the bear-skin at his feet, they shone from every book of hers that lay on the table, they stared back at him from the mirror. He got up and shook himself.

“Pshaw! It’s time I went home and went to bed.”

He let himself quietly out of the house just as the first signs of day were visible.

CHAPTER XII.

HESTER was so stiff and sore the next day that she did not come down-stairs, nor for two or three days besides.

She was evidently struggling under a burden of depression which blanched her face and made her eyes unnaturally sombre. John Cecil had ridden up to the door to inquire for her, but had not entered the house nor stopped for more than a moment, much to the disgust of

Carey, who harangued him from the steps of the porch without inducing him to dismount from his horse. Neither Hester nor Carey knew that he had kept a vigil at Chapel House the night that Hester had fainted, and, oddly enough, Aunt Jenifer did not mention it,—not from any spasm of reserve on her part, but because it was so much a matter of course that John should stay with them in any stress or emergency.

As the days slipped by and John did not come to Chapel House, it became a matter of comment. Hester wondered what had become of this companionable man to whom she and all the Jenifers owed such a debt of gratitude. Why had he so suddenly dropped away from them? She could see that Carey was fretting about it, and it required all the tact she possessed to keep the child from going every day to besiege John with questions as to why he was so busy in mid-winter and why he never came to see them. When they went out for their brisk afternoon walk, Carey would look up and down the turnpike, and if a rider appeared she would exclaim, "Here comes John!" then she would invariably add, as they both watched the advancing horseman, "No, it isn't, either." And Hester would be as much disappointed as the child, and they would return to the house, Carey grumbling that John was a "mean old thing," and Hester regretting the pleasant talks which evidently he meant should be a thing of the past.

She had not been able to shake off the nightmare of thoughts which had had possession of her since her last trip to town. She determined to see Mr. Willetts again, and there was a dreary satisfaction in the thought that at least the coming interview would not contain any hidden surprises for her.

Mr. Willetts could not refrain from an expression of surprise when he saw Hester. He said he feared she had worried herself ill. This, of course, she promptly disclaimed. Then, with her usual directness, she drew out the leases and laid them on the table, saying that she could not sign them; she felt that she could not take Colonel Brent's property, nor the responsibility belonging to it, under the circumstances. Mr. Willetts prepared himself patiently to convince her that any such step was utterly out of the question: the only thing she could do was to make a fight in court. It would be a very sensational case if it went into court, and everything painful in her life would be dragged to light. The old tragedy at Brent would be revived, and, on the whole, he advised her to accept things as they were, and let the future take care of itself.

This argument carried great weight with Hester. The very thought of any one prying into her life with Colonel Brent was intolerable to her, and she said, without any further opposition,—

"I will give up, Mr. Willetts; I will not think of going into court with it for a moment. I could not endure to be cross-questioned as I should have to be. I had thought that there must be some way out of it, but I see that I shall have to submit."

"That is right, Mrs. Brent, believe me: to accept it quietly is the best policy. I should advise you to go South for the rest of the winter. Go to Florida, and stay till spring: you look as though you needed balmy air and genial skies."

With this parting advice the interview was closed, and Hester, after signing the leases, took her departure.

When she left the train at the little station where the stage was usually waiting, the loquacious and friendly Lemuel was not to be seen. Everything was quiet and had an air of desertion. It was not yet dark. Hester walked up and down the platform, thinking that he would drive up any moment. Just then a down train stopped at the station and let off some passengers; and while she was wondering what she should do, she saw John Cecil walking towards her. He had evidently just got off the down train.

"Can I help you, Mrs. Brent?" asked he, as he took off his hat. When Hester turned towards him he was startled at the change in her. He had not seen her in several weeks, for he had found out already that danger threatened him in every glance of her eyes and in every turn of her speech, and he had resolved not to put himself in the way of this danger. But chance had thwarted him.

"Thanks, Mr. Cecil," replied Hester; "I am waiting for the stage."

"You cannot wait here, Mrs. Brent; you must let me drive you over." There was a touch of formality in his manner that made her say, hastily,—

"Oh, no! I don't mind waiting, Mr. Cecil. I could not think of inconveniencing you."

She turned away, to signify that she meant what she said. John strode promptly away, and Hester continued to walk up and down the platform, reflecting that Mr. Cecil had been quite relieved at her refusal to let him drive her to Chapel House. But almost simultaneously with this reflection a big, powerful bay horse attached to a high-seated cart was driven rapidly to the edge of the platform, and John Cecil's authoritative voice said,—

"Come, Mrs. Brent."

Just as he was about to step to the platform further to urge Hester and to help her in, a freight train came sweeping heavily past, and it required all his attention to hold his plunging, rearing horse. In a few minutes he said,—

"My horse won't stand long enough for me to get down and help you up, Mrs. Brent: will you let me give you a hand from here?" He stretched out his hand to Hester.

Hester stepped up into the cart beside him, and they whirled away. After they had crossed the last of the railroad tracks John turned and looked at her. "You aren't half warm enough, Mrs. Brent." And he carefully tucked the buffalo robe about her, and pulled out from under the seat a lap-robe, which he folded deftly, shawl-fashion, and laid it over her shoulders, pulling it up well about her ears. Then he gazed down into her face with solicitude in his eyes.

"You are looking ill. I had hoped you were better," he said.

Something in his tone and something in the care with which he had wrapped her up to protect her from the cold touched a chord in Hester and set it vibrating. It was so unusual for any one to show her any personal care and protection, or to feel any solicitude for her

welfare, that the kindly tone and sympathetic voice sent a tide of feeling rushing over her. She felt that she should like to put her head down somewhere and cry. She turned away and looked out upon the roadside.

John instantly divined that she was unnerved. It was evident that she was harassed and almost ill with some worry: he ought not to have told her that she looked ill. He felt that he should like to get out of the cart and break some one's head; almost any one would do who was handy. But instead he cut the horse with his whip, which made it bound forward and sent them swaying and swinging over the road at a reckless pace. Hester held to the side of the cart with one hand, and with the other she involuntarily clutched at the reins, turning a frightened glance upon her companion. John was instantly recalled to himself; he drew down the horse, and said, apologetically,—

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Brent, but I was metaphorically punching some one's head just then, and I fear that I nearly upset you. But you ought never to touch the reins as you did just now."

"Yes, I know I shouldn't, but I thought that the horse was running away, and I was not conscious of what I was doing. I don't believe that I have a very deep respect for your driving, Mr. Cecil," said Hester. And she laughed in a slightly hysterical way as she spoke.

John was greatly relieved that the tension of the previous few minutes was broken, and he determined that it should not be his fault if for the rest of the drive Mrs. Brent's worries were not forgotten by her, or at least put aside. He exerted himself to the utmost, and gradually Hester began to talk brightly, and even to laugh; and she was surprised at the shortness of the drive, as they came within sight of Dorset lights.

When they turned into the avenue of trees at Chapel House, John said, with a slight change of tone,—

"Mrs. Brent, if I can ever serve you in any way, or be of any use to you, you will call on me?"

"Certainly. And you will come and see us? Carey has been grumbling because you are so busy," said Hester. And she put out her hand as they stood before the door.

John held it in a warm clasp. He looked directly into her face, and said, gravely, with a touch of significance in his tone,—

"You bid me come?"

"Why, of course," she returned, frankly, but with a slight surprise in her manner. And they separated.

There was scarcely a day during the succeeding weeks when there was not some sort of meeting, either by chance or design, between the two. If Hester and Carey went out for a walk, they always met John; or if Carey happened to be roaming the place alone, she would invariably bring John home, just to look at the fox, which was languishing in its imprisonment; or John would stop at Chapel House with a bit of game, or a book. But oftener there was no pretext whatever. He knew how he stood, and there was no longer any disguise.

One afternoon, when he met Hester and Carey walking within a short distance of his own place, a sudden longing seized him to have Hester cross his threshold, and he boldly suggested that they should visit his home, "The Farm," as it was called.

Hester demurred.

"Oh, come on, sister," cried Carey. "John's place is lots of fun; he's got a lot of nice horses, an' queer dogs with short legs, an' he keeps everythin' in a mess, an' it's so nice an' smelly of tobacco."

John laughed at Carey's description, but he turned an anxious look on Hester. Carey, however, had already decided the question, and danced along in the direction of John's home. So there seemed nothing for Hester but to follow, slowly and reluctantly.

"The Farm" was an old-fashioned place standing unpretendingly in a grove of trees. It was manifest that more care and attention had been spent on the housing of the horses and cattle than on the housing of the master; for the barns, stables, and outbuildings were all of the most modern and approved fashion, while the house looked as if nothing had been done to it for many a year. John took them all over the premises. Everything was inspected, even to the kennels. When they turned at last to the house, Carey said, with a sniff of scorn,—

"We've seen the best of it now. There ain't anythin' worth much in the house, 'cept Aunt Polly's ginger snaps." And, with all the air of proprietorship, she ushered them into the house and threw open the sitting-room door.

It was truly a man's room, comfortably furnished, and with a blazing open fire; but the curtains were dragged away from the windows, and newspapers, books, and surveyors' instruments lay scattered about on the chairs and tables and on the floor as well. A rifle and shot-gun ornamented different corners, a driving-whip and a pair of spurs lay on an old-fashioned lounge, and a decanter and glasses, together with several pipes, held possession of the mantel-piece. When they entered, John looked hurriedly around, to see if there were any offending thing to hustle out of sight. He drove away three dogs which were asleep in front of the fire, pulled up a deep leather arm-chair for Hester, and said, deprecatingly,—

"I'm afraid it's a regular howling den, Mrs. Brent."

Hester looked all around her, and then with amused eyes said,—

"It looks rather like a man: one would know that no woman lived here. But it is a charming old-fashioned room."

Carey had darted out into the passage, and was calling loudly to Aunt Polly, John's ancient housekeeper:

"Aunt Polly, we want some ginger snaps, an' some of John's best wine."

When Hester heard this order she was horrified, and arose from her chair to call Carey back.

"Let her alone, Mrs. Brent; Carey's perfectly at home; she's the only thing that has kept me human or that ever brings life into this old house," he said, pushing back the decanter on the mantel-piece to make room for his elbow as he leaned against it.

He stood facing Hester. He wanted to have an undisturbed, un-

obstructed view of this woman sitting in his arm-chair before his fire. It was the first time he had ever seen such a vision in this room, and it enthralled him. He would never see it again, probably, in his lifetime, for no woman, save his old housekeeper and Caroline Jenifer, ever crossed his threshold. He was conscious of nothing save her presence here alone with him; everything else faded from him; he did not even hear what she was saying; his eyes were fastened upon her face; he did not know that he was gazing at her with all a man's deep, absorbing passion, and that she would inevitably read in his eyes what he had determined to keep from her knowledge.

Hester after a little time found that she was keeping up a one-sided conversation, and she suddenly looked up at him from the depths of her chair. She stopped in the middle of her speech and gazed at him in consternation. She remained for a minute spellbound under the steady fire of his eyes. She read their language and understood it. Incredulity, then conviction, and finally utter fright swept over her face in quick succession. She was no raw, ignorant girl, incapable of reading such intensity of gaze. She arose hastily from her chair, as if to make her escape. John, without dropping his eyes, went quickly towards her the moment she moved. He laid his hand on hers in eager pressure. He did not know what he was doing; he saw only her face, which drew him like a magnet. He bent his head to hers, and Hester's heart stood still.

"Open the door, John; I've got the snaps an' the wine, an' Aunt Polly's bringin' some other goodies," called out Carey suddenly in the passage; and a vigorous kick at the door indicated that her hands were too busy to turn the knob.

The spell was broken. John stumbled to the door and opened it. Carey came in with her hands full and deposited the result of her foragings. Hester was looking out of the window, with her back turned to the room.

"Come, John, an' help me fix things." And Carey swept off on the floor everything that already encumbered the table.

John mechanically helped her. His mind was in a tumult. What had he done? What had he been going to do? What was Mrs. Brent thinking? He had been mad to let his love suddenly overmaster him; for he knew that when she had risen from her chair she had read him aright, and she was in no humor to hear words of love. Not that he had uttered any, he was thankful to remember, but he was not certain that he had not meant to take her in his arms. He was savage with himself, and his face settled into a stern, hard expression.

How the next half-hour was passed he could scarcely tell. He knew that Mrs. Brent had turned around from the window and had come to the table perfectly composed; that she had touched a wineglass to her lips, and that almost immediately afterwards she had quietly and tactfully expressed her thanks for his hospitality, and had even watched with a smile of amusement while Carey had stuffed her coat-pockets full of the beloved ginger snaps. Then he remembered that he had walked with them to the boundary-lines that separated his property from Jenifer Manor, and that they had taken leave of him quite gayly.

Then followed a couple of days of uncontrollable restlessness. His impulse was to go, like a man, and have it out, but it would be absolutely indecent to speak words of love to Mrs. Brent yet. He fiercely resented the trick which Fate had played him in letting him go half his life without knowing what love was and then plunging him headlong into it with a woman who was wearing the deepest mourning for another man.

On the third evening that John had carried on this restless warfare with himself, wondering how he should continue to meet Mrs. Brent without speaking words of love to her, and how it would all end, Carey Jenifer burst into the room just after dark. She was out of breath and eager with excitement.

"I've come to say good-by, John; we're goin' away early in the mornin', an' I slipped off to say good-by to you," she said.

John sprang to his feet. "What do you mean, Carey?"

"Why, sister's goin' to Florida, an' perhaps to Bermuda, an' I don't know where all besides; an' she's goin' to take me, an' we ain't comin' back till next summer, an' I couldn't go without comin' to say good-by to you. I tried to get sister to let you go 'long with us, but she didn't seem to think much of the plan."

John was silent so long after Carey's explanation that she exclaimed,—

"John, I don't believe you care one bit 'cause we're goin' away."

John looked eager and excited. He took a restless turn up and down the room, trying to grasp the meaning of this sudden move. At last he answered, slowly,—

"I care a great deal more than you've any idea of, Carey."

"Well, John, why'n't you say somethin', then, instead of ragin' round the room?" asked she, grumblingly, as she fidgeted about, following him up and down. But John did not heed her remark.

He said, finally,—

"Carey, I want you to make me a promise; I want you to behave always like a little woman and take good care of Sister Hester. Will you?"

"Yes; an', John, shall I take a message to sister? shall I give her your love an' tell her you sent her good-by?"

"No," said John, shortly.

"Well, good-by, then. I 'ain't got time to stay; it's awful dark, an' they don't know where I am; but of course I couldn't think of goin' away without seein' you."

She threw her arms around John's neck in a strangling embrace, and gave him two hard little kisses, then she darted out of the room and shut the door with a bang that made every window in the house rattle.

John was left in such a state of surprise that it was some little time before he could decide not to follow Carey to Chapel House and seek an interview with Mrs. Brent. Was she running away? he wondered. He knew she had read the love in his eyes. Could it be possible that she was afraid? If she was not, why should she go away so suddenly? She would only have to stay and let him make a fool of himself,—it

would not take long, he was sure to do it,—and then she would be free of him, unless— This possibility sent the blood tingling through him, and kept him sitting far into the night, dreaming dreams and seeing visions in the depths of the fire.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was not until the full tide of summer was over that John Cecil again saw Hester Brent. The winter dragged its slow length along, and John had counted each vanishing day with impatience. He felt that if he could only hang on to the calendar long enough it would bring him through these trying weeks.

Once or twice he received childish scrawls, full of disjointed sentences and badly-spelled words, but breathing a keen delight in novel surroundings; and with almost every other word there was an allusion to Sister Hester. But John did not answer these childish letters; he would not put himself in the way of the temptation of even writing to little Carey, so resolved was he to maintain absolute silence.

When May came and all the countryside was a hanging garden of locust-bloom, when the vines and shrubs had clothed Chapel House in their tenderest green, John heard that Mrs. Brent was coming back. He hastily made preparations to leave the neighborhood. He closed with an offer for some engineering work in another part of the State, which would take him away for three months or more; and by the time he came back there would need to be no embargo upon his lips.

Great were Carey's indignation and disgust, upon their arrival home, when in answer to her first eager inquiry for John she was told that he had gone away.

"Gone away! where?" she exclaimed, half crying, turning appealingly to Aunt Jenifer.

"Oh, he's gone off on some engineerin' work, and will be gone all summer. I d'n' know what's the matter with John; he's been over here every day or two since you went away, but I couldn't get a word out of him; he was as glum as glum could be, an' mooned about here in the sittin'-room, fidgetin' with the books. I declare I think he was daft," wound up Aunt Jenifer. Then, as she inspected Hester, she added, in a puzzled voice,—

"Somehow, Hester, it 'pears to me like you've changed: you look years younger than when you went away. What is it, I wonder?"

"I feel younger, aunt, and brighter. Somehow this spring I have felt a return of youth." There was a bright, hopeful look in Hester's eyes, and a buoyancy in her manner, which made Aunt Jenifer stare at her and say,—

"I declare, I believe you've grown handsome again."

But Hester only slightly smiled and made no reply. She had felt a keen pang when she heard that John Cecil was gone, but she instinctively understood the situation. She felt a conviction that he had gone away to avoid her and that he would return when the summer was over. Beyond this point she would not let her thoughts go, for

all during the late winter and early spring her mind, in utter defiance of her will, had run riot. One vivid picture had come back to her again and again: a man leaning against a mantel-piece, gazing at her with heart and soul in his eyes. And at the recollection of his impetuous movement towards her, with his face bent down over hers, her heart would leap and then stand still. She could only blot out this picture by suddenly recalling a certain legal document, one clause of which held her as in a vice and made her grow hot and cold by turns with indignation. Perhaps something would turn up to render this clause null and void; or perhaps she would have courage to defy it; or, better still, she might nerve herself to obey it. But she shuddered at this thought.

It was in this half-happy, half-miserable frame of mind that Hester returned to Chapel House. When she saw the old place, partly covered with tender, clinging vines which half hid its rugged, weather-beaten outlines, she determined, as she crossed the threshold, that if happiness were offered her she would take it, and that the old home must and should be to her a veritable Chapel of Ease.

The very first thing that she noticed after her arrival home was a group of workmen busily engaged in digging up the old Jenifer field where the new road had been staked off. The fence was down, and it was evident that the commissioners had taken John Cecil's advice and that they meant to run the road through her property and pay the damages. Hester promptly questioned the foreman in charge of the work, and then she walked thoughtfully away. Should she make a fight? or should she let John Cecil have his way? She wondered what had become of her desire to oppose this road: was it possible that she was so much under a spell that she could change all her ideas and become indifferent where she had formerly been bitterly and obstinately opposed? She must write to Mr. Willetts and take advice in the matter; but she knew in her heart that the whole thing would drop, and that the little public of Dorset in the months to come would ride and drive through Jenifer's Manor without restriction.

But meantime she felt that she needed employment of some kind to keep her restlessness from becoming too manifest. So she made elaborate plans for the restoration and repairing of her property. An army of workmen came from town, and almost every nook and corner inside and outside of the old house were invaded and given up to them. As for Carey, she watched everything with unmixed delight. She curled herself up in the piles of shavings, and gave instructions to the workmen in her most voluble manner. She borrowed surreptitiously their paint-pots and brushes and gave an extraordinary coat of color to the chicken-coops, which so demoralized the various families of hens and chickens that not one fowl knew its own abode; and she thought it very hard and cruel of Hester not to let her also give a touch or two to the wooden slabs in the family burying-ground, just to freshen them up.

So the summer wore on. When the workmen were gone and Hester no longer had anything pressing to occupy her, she could scarcely keep up any show of spirits. She felt that until the anni-

versary of Colonel Brent's death should be over, she could not feel that the past was behind her.

Towards the end of August Aunt Jenifer suddenly asked, one day,—

"Isn't it nearly a year since Robert died, Hester?"

"The anniversary was yesterday," she answered, quietly.

"Hester, you've never told me anythin' about Robert's and your life abroad: why is it?" asked the elder woman.

"Aunt Jenifer, I cannot talk about it. There are some things best forgotten, or at least best not spoken of," said Hester, shortly, her face growing dark.

"Hester," pursued Aunt Jenifer, dropping her voice to a low key and speaking nervously, "did you ever know about that awful story of the young slave girl at Brent years ago? Did you ever know that Robert was at the bottom of that tragedy?"

"Oh, hush, Aunt Jenifer! I never knew it till just after I was married, when it was too late, and I had gone to Brent on a visit. I hate Brent and everything connected with it!" exclaimed Hester, passionately. Her face was pale, and there was the hunted, appealing look in her eyes which John knew so well, and which stirred him so strangely.

The days grew shorter. September threw its long, sweeping shadows across the lawn. The sun began to set behind the house farther and farther out of sight. The swallows circled about the old chimneys earlier every day, and would soon disappear altogether. The harvest-moon rose in all its yellow splendor, and every little winged creature that belonged to the insect world joined the homely chorus and sang and chirped all through the soft, warm nights. Occasionally there would be borne upon the air the rich melodies of the old plantation songs as they were sung lustily by the negroes coming from camp-meeting.

On one of these early soft September nights Hester was sitting on the steps. Darkness had fallen; everything was indistinct. There was a broad streak of light shining from the open hall door. Occasionally there was the rattle of a heavy vehicle out on the pike, or a snatch of darky melody. The village lights shone through the trees. All sounds were far away and muffled. And Hester was dreaming.

That night John Cecil came home, and came immediately to Chapel House. Carey's quick ears caught the sound of his horse's hoofs. She was out in the avenue in a twinkling, awaiting him; and as he approached she jumped out from the trees and clamored to be taken up. In this fashion they came to the foot of the steps where Hester was sitting.

John sprang off his horse. Hester got up from the steps. Their hands met in the dark, and no word was spoken. Jasper took the horse. As he turned to lead it away, John said, coaxingly,—

"Carey, will you see that Jasper puts up my horse properly?"

"John Cecil, I'm goin' to stay right straight here: Jasper can 'tend to your horse. I 'ain't seen you in seven months, an' I'm goin' to stay an' see you now."

Hester sat down again on the steps. John sat just below her and leaned back with his elbow resting on the next step above. The light from the open door fell across one of Hester's hands, which lay upon her lap; but her face was in shadow. Carey hovered close beside them. One minute she sat on the steps, the next she was out upon the gravel of the drive-way, scraping it up under her feet and talking volubly all the time. Her conversation took the form of a string of questions: "When did John get home?" "Where had John been?" "Why hadn't he answered her letters?" and so on, endlessly.

Neither John nor Hester talked. Indeed, they could not stem the flow of words from Carey. At last the child said, disgustedly,—

"I never saw two such old 'mums' in my life as you 'n' Hester are. I guess I'll go 'n' find Jasper." And she was off as soon as she had ceased speaking.

The two figures on the steps remained silent and perfectly still. It seemed to Hester that she never had heard the tree-toads and crickets make such a clamor before. John was gazing fixedly at the hand that lay upon her lap in the broad line of light. He was wondering if he dared. He could not see her face; he had no guide to her feelings, but some subtle instinct made him suddenly brave everything. He leaned forward and laid his muscular hand upon hers. She turned, and in the light from the door which shone upon his uncovered head she saw his eloquent face and intense eyes. As his hand closed in strong pressure on hers, she said, appealingly, "I beg of you, don't speak," and she got up hurriedly.

John sprang to his feet, and said, questioningly, as he bent his head to hers,—

"But if I dare to act?" And in the same instant his arms closed around her, and Hester was passionately kissed on lips, eyes, and hair. Then he released her, and said, in a half-abashed tone, in which there was a ring of deep manly emotion,—

"Forgive me, Hester, if I have been rough and impetuous, but I have risked everything to-night. I have loved you ever since you stood under the persimmon-tree." He paused, then said, pleadingly, as she did not speak,—

"If you knew how I have eaten my heart out during the last few months while waiting for the time to come when I might tell you this, Hester, you could not turn me away with my kisses upon your lips." And he made an impetuous motion towards her.

Hester put out her hand uncertainly to ward him off, but it was quickly imprisoned, and he continued,—

"Ever since last winter, when I showed you that I loved you, I have had down in my heart a conviction that you love me. Own it to me now," he pleaded. As she remained silent, he changed the form of pleading, and quickly and insistently said, "Then deny it," and he waited a moment for the denial which did not come. He drew her into the light to look into her face and to read there what her lips refused either to affirm or to deny. The emotion and struggle which she had been undergoing and which had kept her silent were clearly depicted upon it. John said in a low voice, after gazing at her,—

"Hester, I know that you love me!" And he bent his face to hers. But she drew back, and said, imploringly,—

"Wait, John. You do not know what you are doing. I cannot love you; I cannot, I must not."

"Why not, Hester?" He held her hands so that she could not move back into the shadow nor hide her face from him, while he held her eyes with the fire of his own.

"Don't ask me why; I am not like other women. I have been once married. Oh, for pity's sake, let me go!" She pleaded with distress growing on her face and in her eyes. But John only tightened the grasp of her hands, and said, with quick determination,—

"It is too late: I cannot let you go now. I know I am rough and brusque, and perhaps I have come too soon, but my love will be no longer held in leash. You must answer me, Hester, one way or the other: your loving me or not will settle it all in two minutes." He held his head so close to hers that Hester was compelled to look into his eyes, which were so insistent.

She gazed long and intently at him, as if to search every corner of his heart and mind. Should she take what was so passionately offered her? Oh, what should she do? She turned her face away from his eager eyes. He noticed it, and spoke out with impassioned quickness:

"For God's sake, don't turn from me! Look into my eyes and decide, Hester."

Hester looked back, and the struggle and indecision died out of her heart. The past was forgotten, the harassing conditions were blotted out, her heart rose to her eyes and lips, a glow spread over her face, which John read aright. They stood a moment, but John would not break the silence: Hester must speak "the word from which she could not fly." It was not very long in coming. It was grave and deliberate, without falter, without fear. She leaned slightly towards him, and said,—

"I love you, even as you love me."

His arms closed around her; his face dropped to hers; anything farther that she might have said was forever smothered on her lips, and the katydids and tree-toads seemed to be singing a triumphant chorus in the soft night. But not for long. Just then quick-running footsteps were heard, and a voice that came from around the corner of the house said,—

"Oh, such a funny thing, John! I can see yours an' Hester's shadows clear 'cross the gravel path, an' your two noses look like they are bumpin' each other: you don't know how queer it is." And Carey, who could not be depended on for more than a few minutes at a time, burst upon them from out of the dark background.

Hester disengaged herself, but not before Carey had caught full sight of the two figures revealed in the light from the door.

"Why, John Cecil! what in the world are you a-doin'?"

Hester sprang up the steps, not without a protest from John, who, half holding her back, half following her, said, "We'd better face it now, Hester." But she broke away from him and vanished into the house.

"What've you been doin', John?" asked Carey again.

"What did it look like to you, Carey?" asked he, with infinite triumph in his voice.

"Well, I sh'd say you'd been a-kissin' sister, an' I sh'd think you'd be mighty 'shamed of yourself, for sister ain't one of the kissy sort, an' she's gone off, an' I could see she's mad."

"Oh, she was mad, you think?" asked John, resting one foot on an upper step, while he eyed the child with a touch of amusement blent with uneasiness as he asked,—

"What should you think, Carey, of Sister Hester marrying me?"

The answer was some time in coming. Carey sat down suddenly on the steps and stared in amazement at John. She was trying to make up her mind whether he was serious or not. She finally answered, slowly,—

"Well, John, I sort of knew you'd go and get silly about sister, but I didn't guess you'd be so bad as all that." She sat very still, thinking it all over, while John watched her. Suddenly an idea struck her:

"I say, John, where'd you live? Would you come over here with us, or would we all go over to The Farm? I tell you what, it'd be heaps of fun to go over to your house to live; but I d'n' know as there'd be room over there for all of us, 'cause there'd be Becky, an' Jasper, an' the dog, an' the new horse, an' man, an' Aunt Jenifer, an' me; that'd be seven of us." And she shook her head dubiously.

"And where would Sister Hester come in?" asked John, delightedly.

"Oh, yes! I forgot sister; I s'pose she'd have to go 'long; that'd be eight. I guess, John, on the whole you'd better come over here to live, 'cause we've got the most room; an' what fun it'll be! I can just use all your things real handy. I say, John, you won't go an' back out? you will marry sister?" asked she, struck with sudden fear that this might be idle jest on his part.

"Please God and I will," answered John, fervently.

The big harvest-moon rose majestically and shed her mellow light upon every shrub and tree and threw quivering shadows over the grass. The lights of the village were blotted out. The stars paled in the heavens. Everything grew quiet on the old plantation, and John and Carey sat on the steps and waited, but Hester did not come back.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE way in which John and Hester spent the next twelve hours was characteristic of most people who have passed through an absorbing crisis. John had lingered on the lawn at Chapel House, hoping that Hester would come back, but when she did not appear he finally rode away in the moonlight. He dropped the reins on his horse's neck and gave himself up to the thoughts that had possession of him.

She had said that she loved him even as he loved her, and he re-

called every line of her eloquent face. It was a face that was as open as the day: it would never conceal anything; and he dwelt upon this idea with all a lover's rapture. Henceforth all her worries would be his: she would keep nothing from him; her unhappy past would be his to guard jealously; he would share every passing thought and emotion. And John, in his happy fool's paradise, felt himself a very Samson in the strength with which he meant to bear every burden and meet every emergency in the days to come.

He stopped a moment on the turnpike near the old persimmon-tree to recall the day he had seen her trying to knock off persimmons, and as he rode on it was with a happy laugh as he remembered the way her missiles had fallen.

As for Hester, when she groped her way up the dim staircase to her own dark room she was in a chaotic state of mind. She dropped into a chair to try to think. She covered her face with her hands in the dark, as she felt the warm blood rise from her heart to her face. She had been so starved all her life, she had never had any affection, and the wealth of love that had been offered her was overwhelming. All the doubts, all the struggle that had tortured her had been swept away when she stood with John in the light of the open door. As she thought of him and of her own position she slowly came to a decision. John should never know about the wretched will; she would keep it from him; she would consult Mr. Willetts, and act entirely upon his advice; he would manage all the disagreeable details for her; she would only have to be present at the final scene. And she shivered in the dark.

But it was the only way, if she wanted to keep her inheritance and marry John too. She knew that according to tradition and romance she ought to renounce the money in order to marry him, but she was an end-of-the-century woman, and could not go back to any romantic period. It would be poor satisfaction all around to renounce the money, and thrust herself, together with Aunt Jenifer and Carey, upon his moderate fortune. She knew instinctively that if he were told beforehand of the condition in Colonel Brent's will he would rebel against her fulfilling it. So there was nothing to do but to keep it from him entirely.

Thus she argued and talked to herself in the dark. Gradually the moon rose and threw quivering uncertain light into the room. Once Carey came to the door; but Hester did not wish to encounter Carey's prying eyes, so she crouched down out of sight, and Carey, seeing nothing but the moon looking in through the window which cast a spectral light upon the old mahogany press, hurried away; for there was always something about the old press, together with the griffins carved on the posts of the bed, that shook her nerves.

After Carey had clattered away and the house had grown quiet, Hester threw herself on her bed and fell into a fitful sleep. She thought that she was back in St. Moritz. She was in the big, empty, familiar room of the Swiss hotel. She was numb, and cramped, and, oh, so tired! She was bending over an emaciated, dying man, who, when he occasionally opened his eyes, fixed them upon her with a

malignant glance. Then the scene shifted. It was her wedding-day. John stood beside her, looking fondly at her, when suddenly his face changed: it was Robert, after all, whom she was marrying. She awoke with a shiver, and could not drive away the phantom that had Robert's eyes until she had lighted a lamp and looked around at the familiar things in the room.

The next morning, as soon as John thought that he would be likely to see Hester, he went to Chapel House. The only person he encountered was Carey, who said to him, mysteriously,—

"John, I 'ain't had time to tell sister what you said last night about marryin' her; an' I hope you 'ain't changed your mind?" she asked, anxiously.

"No, Carey, I have not changed my mind; but you must remember that what I told you last night must be a secret between you and me."

"Why, John, you'll have to say somethin' to sister about it, 'cause she wouldn't understand why we all went over to your place to live."

John laughed, and replied by saying, with happy confidence,—

"Run and tell Hester I am here."

"I can't, John, 'cause sister went off to town this mornin' early; that's why I didn't tell her you thought of marryin' her," replied the child.

John's face looked blank: he was surprised, and he felt that somehow he had received a shock.

"Did she leave any message for me?" he asked, anxiously.

"No: the only message was for the carriage to meet the evenin' train," replied Carey.

John was forced to be satisfied with this. Hester probably had made this arrangement to go to town before their interview the night before. Suddenly a deep red flush burned in his face. He remembered that Hester was a rich woman, and that her riches came through Colonel Brent. The thought of Colonel Brent and Colonel Brent's money made him set his teeth together sharply.

Meantime Hester was saying to Mr. Willetts in his office,—

"You are sure you are advising me for the best, in advising me to keep this a secret from Mr. Cecil?"

"I am certain of it, Mrs. Brent. Any man in Mr. Cecil's position would rebel against the condition this will impose upon you, and in withholding the knowledge of it from him you are doing only what is right and proper. I should advise my own daughter to do this if she were placed as you are. But you will have to give me a little time to arrange this matter. When is your wedding to be?" he asked.

Hester turned a little red, then a little white, and answered, nervously,—

"Nothing is settled, Mr. Willetts: the wedding-day has not been mentioned. I wanted to see you before I was committed to anything. I don't believe any woman was ever so harassed before," she wound up, impatiently.

Hester was a good deal embarrassed, for Mr. Willetts had been looking her through and through during this most trying interview.

"The position is certainly harassing, Mrs. Brent; and if I may be allowed to make a suggestion in so delicate a matter, I should advise you not to put off your marriage, for the sooner this matter is settled and over the better for your happiness and peace of mind."

"Perhaps so," said Hester, doubtfully; then she added, dejectedly,—

"I do not see how it is to be managed at all with any sort of decency."

"Leave it all to me, Mrs. Brent. I will send a safe and discreet person to Europe. This will take six weeks or two months. When this is accomplished, all you will have to do will be to tell me the date of your wedding; I will arrange all the rest, and I will make it as easy as I can for you."

"I am sure you will, but I don't see how I can possibly be in two different places at the same time; and even if I succeed in being in two places at the same time, how can I do it and all the world not know it?" demanded Hester, vehemently.

"You are not expected to be in two places at the same time, Mrs. Brent;" and Mr. Willetts smiled at Hester's woman-like exaggeration and irritability. Then he continued,—

"You are only expected to be in two places on the same day. And if you will trust in my discretion and management and will carefully guard this whole matter from everybody, I promise to bring you through to a happy conclusion."

"Yes, if I ever have a wedding-day it will no doubt be a brilliant success," said she, bitterly.

Suddenly she remembered John's honest face, as it had looked into hers with such entire love and confidence the night before, and she wished despairingly that she were not involved in this mesh of secrecy from which she could not free herself. As she rose to take leave of Mr. Willetts, she said to him, very gravely and with a half sigh,—

"Well, Mr. Willetts, I have made up my mind to marry again, and I have also made up my mind to keep Colonel Brent's property; and if you will stand by me in this matter until we reach the end of it, you will find me tractable and only too glad to follow your advice and to agree to any arrangement you may make." She put out a grateful hand to Mr. Willetts as she took her leave.

When Hester was about to step off the train at the quiet little station, she glanced around for her carriage, and her eyes encountered those of John Cecil. She knew at once that he was waiting for her. He said quietly, as he took from her the few things she held in her hands,—

"Your train was late, Hester."

At the sound of his voice and her own name, Hester turned a bright pink.

"My man must be waiting for me," she said, nervously, "but I don't see him anywhere." And she glanced about again, but saw nothing save John's cart and the stage in the distance.

"I met your carriage on the road, and I sent it home. Won't I do just as well, Hester?"

John's voice was dangerously tender, and somehow Hester's composure vanished. She could have shaken herself for being so much embarrassed, but she could feel John's eyes on her face, and she wondered if he were not looking straight into her mind and heart and reading there what she and Mr. Willetts had been conspiring to keep secret. But John's face was as unsuspiciously trusting as a man's face can be who loves for the first time thoroughly. He helped her into the cart, gathered up the reins, and until they had crossed the tracks and left the station behind nothing was said.

If Hester had been a girl in her teens, she could not have felt more fluttered and awkward than she was at the prospect of this long *tête-à-tête* drive. When they had passed the last straggling houses, John turned to her, and the look in his eyes made her hurriedly say the first thing that came to her mind:

"How did you happen to be at the station to-day?"

"How can you ask a question with so obvious a reply, Hester? Did you think that I should be likely to miss such a chance, with your words of last night ringing all day in my ears?" And he hastily gathered the reins into one hand and dropped his arm around Hester.

"Oh, please, please don't! We're on the turnpike, where every one can see you," cried she, in terror.

"The turnpike is as deserted as Sahara, Hester, and there is nothing to look at us except that little gray squirrel over there on the fence-rail; but I don't mind waiting till we come to yonder clump of trees," said he, with the utmost coolness, keeping his eyes on her embarrassed face. Scarcely had they passed into the shadow of the trees when Hester was gathered closely to him and her face was impetuously kissed again and again. Then he said,—

"I cannot help losing my head about you, Hester. I have wanted to be assured that last night was a reality, and when I found you gone this morning it was all that I could do to keep from following you to town. The day has been interminable. What kept you all day away from me?"

"I had to go to town to see my lawyer on business which would not wait," she replied, in a low voice, while her face clouded perceptibly.

At the mention of her lawyer John's face was grave. He knew that business with Mr. Willetts meant Colonel Brent and Colonel Brent's estate. He did not speak for a moment, and gazed straight ahead of him between the horse's ears. Hester saw and felt the sudden gravity. She looked up at him. All her misgivings and doubts rushed over her, and she said, earnestly,—

"John, I feel that in linking my life with yours I shall perhaps be doing you a wrong."

John turned suddenly to say something in protest, but Hester continued,—

"Perhaps this love which has come to us may be more of pain than joy; for, oh, John, one of us has had a past." John felt her shiver, and he tightened his arm about her.

"Hester, so long as you are close beside me there is no past; everything is present and future. You have brought me the only thing that makes my life seem worth while. I shouldn't be a man if I didn't wish that I might have known and loved you first; but we must not have any vain regrets. If you torture yourself with thoughts of the past from which I am shut out, you will torture me."

Hester looked up, and said, fervently, "I will not think of the past, but of the future; if only——" And she stopped.

"If only what?" he questioned.

But Hester did not finish her sentence. She had wanted to say, "if only we are once safely married," but she could scarcely say it, no matter how much it might chime in with John's wishes. As if divining her thought, he said,—

"When will you marry me, Hester?"

"I don't know," she nervously said, averting her eyes.

"Why not say to-morrow, or next week? There is nothing to prevent it," he urged, trying to look into her face, which was turned away from him.

Hester groaned mentally. Then she suddenly rallied herself and laughed at the idea. John laughed too, shamefacedly.

"Next week would be a little hurried perhaps for you, but it would be none too soon for me," he said, in a light tone.

At this point he was suddenly made aware of the fact that his horse had betaken itself to the side of the road and was quietly nibbling at the bushes; and for a few minutes he gave his undivided attention to the road before him.

This drive of John and Hester's from the station in the warm September night was never forgotten by either of them. Sometimes the horse trotted along with strict attention to business, as if it meant to get somewhere soon, but oftener its gait would slow down to a walk which always ended in a zigzag nibble at the bushes in the fence-corners, till it was jerked into the road again whenever John happened for a moment to take note of the world about him or to remember where he was. Now the road led through darkening woods, now it came out into brighter patches of light, whenever there were open fields on either side; and over and above all there was a running accompaniment of crickets, katydids, and tree-toads along the roadside. The stage rattled past them and soon left them far behind. Lemuel craned his neck in passing, to see who it was with John Cecil; for the moon had not yet risen, and the darkening night made things indistinct, and he had not happened to see Mrs. Brent get out of the train at the station. But he was reasonably sure that it was she, and he gave a long-drawn-out whistle of satisfaction, as he thought of the bit of news he should have to tell at the post-office, and of all the delightful possibilities of gossip it opened up.

The two in the cart were all unconscious of Lemuel's observation and reflections. They did not hurry their pace; they fell farther and farther behind; and never in the history of Dorset parish had it taken any one so long to come from the station as it took John and Hester on this early autumn night.

CHAPTER XV.

It needs only a faint hint, or often no hint at all, to set tongues to gossiping in a small country town; and it only needed Lemuel to announce in the post-office, as he threw the mail-bags over the counter, that he had seen John Cecil driving Mrs. Brent from the station, and that they were taking their time about it, to start a running fire of comment and conjecture. Some one said, jocosely,—

"Cut you out of a job, Lem;" which was followed by the astute remark of another who lounged in the open door,—

"'Pears to me like Mrs. Brent's beginnin' to take notice;" which called forth yet another, to the effect that

"It'd be a darned good thing for John Cecil to be hooked by a rich widow;" and so on.

When John drove briskly through the little town fully an hour later than the stage, he was challenged at the toll-gate. Although every horse and every vehicle in his possession were well known to all Dorset, and although he called out his name as he tried to pass the toll-keeper, he was stopped and the lantern was flashed full into Hester's face, so that her identity could not be disputed. John was annoyed almost beyond control, and as he started his horse with a sharp cut of the whip he muttered something under his breath which Hester did not catch.

The next day there was a whisper of gossip all up and down the village, which as the days went by increased and spread. The possibilities of an affair between John Cecil and Mrs. Brent were fully canvassed. Everything concerning Hester's girlhood and former marriage was again eagerly discussed, although it seemed as if nothing could be left to talk about, so thoroughly had her affairs been whispered over at the time she came home. All the ugly stories of Colonel Brent were revived, added to, and passed from lip to lip.

Suddenly a bomb was thrown from no one knew where. A low whisper ran around the village that it was by no means certain that Colonel Brent was dead. It was positively known that he had never been brought to this country and buried at Brent, and it was remembered that Hester had always avoided all mention of him and of her life abroad. There was certainly something queer and mysterious about it; and it was suggested that John Cecil had better be warned. But no one could be found who was willing to undertake even a hint to him.

Meanwhile the days slipped by uncounted, until September, October, and a part of November were gone, and a late Indian summer lingered in the air. All during the brief autumn John almost lived at Chapel House, and everybody on the whole place knew just how things stood with him. But he did not care; everybody was welcome to know that he loved Hester. Nothing had power to disturb him, except that now and then when he had appeared in Dorset lately he had been conscious that there was something in the air; there was an under-current of feeling and curiosity concerning him. One or two people had almost dared to question him about Mrs. Brent, but not even the

hardest had dared to joke with him ; there was something in his face which saved him from that. His engagement to Hester must be made known, and their marriage must take place ; after that people would have him to deal with.

Deciding thus, he rode over to Chapel House one cold, frosty morning, full of the determination to bring Hester to some positive decision. Scarcely had he been admitted when he began the preliminaries of his siege by asking her if she realized that it was the middle of November. Hester knew what was coming, and was about to reply, when Carey burst into the room. She was flushed, and was evidently very much wrought up. Without any greeting to John, she asked, excitedly,—

“Sister, where is Brother Robert buried?”

Hester rose to her feet, and asked, in a startled voice,—

“What is the matter, Carey? Why do you ask such a question?”

“Well, sister, I was in Dorset a little bit ago, an’ I went into the post-office to buy some sour-balls, an’ Mrs. Baker was there, an’ she came up to me an’ said, ‘Carey, do you know where your brother Robert Brent is buried?’ an’ I said, ‘No, I don’t; I don’t think he’s buried anywheres;’ an’ she said, ‘I thought so,’ an’ I asked her what she meant, an’ she only looked real queer an’ knowin’, an’ it made me mad, an’ I told her I knew brother was as dead as a door-nail, an’ I guessed you knew where he was buried. An’ then she smiled, an’ I just told her to mind her own business; an’ now I’ve come to ask you about it. Brother Robert is dead an’ buried, ain’t he?” demanded the child, in an anxious voice.

Hester was deadly white, and stood as if hewn out of stone. John had sprung to his feet, and was scarcely less white than Hester. Through the pallor of his face his eyes blazed with rage and indignation. He clinched his hands as the child rattled off her story, and when Carey had finished there was silence for a moment. Hester tried to speak, but she had no voice. She knew that Dorset had begun to pry into her affairs, but the cruelty of it was in their having attacked and questioned little Carey and in having this scene forced upon John. Carey broke in upon the stillness and upon her flashing thoughts:

“You ‘ain’t answered, sister. Brother is buried somewheres, ain’t he?”

“Yes, Carey, yes,” she hurriedly answered.

“I knew it, an’ I’m goin’ right back to Dorset to tell her so, an’ to tell her he ain’t shut up anywheres.”

“Shut up anywhere?” repeated Hester, with horror in her voice and eyes.

“Yes; she said that people in Dorset thought he was shut up somewhere over in Europe,” answered the child.

“My God! this is infamous!” exclaimed John.

Hester grasped at a chair to steady herself. The whole room swam before her eyes; there was a rushing sound in her ears. John quickly put out his arm to steady her; but Hester was not going to faint. She overcame her momentary weakness, and stood erect.

“Carey,” said John, “you must not pay any attention to this vile

gossip, and you must not go over to the village until Hester gives you leave. And now will you go, like a good child, and leave Sister Hester with me? But first promise not to go to the village."

"I promise, John," said she; and there was a quick rush towards John, and a quick embrace, followed by a sudden slam of the door, and John and Hester were alone.

John spoke at once and decidedly: "Hester, there is but one thing that will silence those lying, infernal tongues, and you know what it is?"

"Yes," she assented.

"Will you marry me to-morrow? or the day after? or one day next week? I want you to name a definite time," he persisted, masterfully.

"But, John, it is impossible for me to name a time just yet," she pleaded.

"Why is it impossible? The sooner you give me the right to nail the stories going about in Dorset the better. Our engagement has already lasted more than two months; this is the middle of November, and there cannot be anything in the way of your marrying me, is there?"

"N—o," said she, doubtfully; then she added, "I only wish to have a little more time." And she looked so weary and worn that John's heart smote him. He said, with a touch of uncertainty and anxiety,—

"Once or twice lately, Hester, I have thought you weren't entirely happy with me; and, much as I love you, I want no unwilling wife. But with such gossip rampant in Dorset the best protection for you will be my name. By heaven! I feel like going and making a clean sweep of the whole town," he said, his anger mounting as he thought of Carey's tale.

Then he came back to the point he wanted to carry. He sat down beside Hester, and said, inquiringly,—

"And our wedding-day, Hester?"

"It shall be within the next four weeks, John; I cannot say what day, for I have not yet heard from Mr.—I mean that I will settle upon a day very soon," wound up Hester, a little incoherently.

John could not help but notice the little slip Hester had made and the accompanying nervousness of her manner. Something suddenly gripped his heart. Hester was concealing something from him; and this thought robbed him for the time being of his peace and happiness.

Hester was quick to see that he was suffering some doubt, and she put forth every power she possessed to win him to forgetfulness. She felt that she was nearer breaking down than she had ever been in her life before, and when John was about to go, the unsteadiness of her hands as they rested in his swept away the slight constraint of his manner, and he exclaimed, anxiously,—

"You are ill, Hester."

But Hester denied it with a faint laugh, and John went away. For the first time since his engagement there was discontent in his heart. And yet the next morning found him going eagerly to Chapel

House, full of anticipations of seeing Hester. Carey was waiting for him, and there was a half-anxious, half-mysterious expression on her face. She slipped her hand into his, and said, in a low voice,—

"Say, John, if I tell you somethin', you won't tell anybody?"

"No," he replied.

"Well, it is about sister. What did you do to her yesterday? Did you scold her?"

"Why, Carey, child, I scold Hester? No! Why do you ask?"

"Well, last night sister went to bed very early, an' in the night I heard her cryin', for my room's been changed next hers, an' I went an' peeked into her room, an' she was sittin' on the side of her bed an' was cryin' an' rockin' back an' forth an' takin' on; so I went in on tiptoe an' said, 'Hester, it's me,' an' she put her arms round me an' cried some more. An' I told her if it was anythin' you'd done to her that I'd never speak to you again, an' she said you hadn't done nothin'; an' then I crept into her bed, an' she didn't cry much more. An' this mornin' she's as white as a sheet, an' her eyes are all swelled up; an' I took her some breakfast, an' a letter that came in the mail, an' she tore it open, an' I thought she was goin' to faint, but she didn't. She told me not to tell any one that she'd been cryin', an' not to let any one come near her but me, an' she wouldn't eat any breakfast, an' I don't know what to do," wound up the child, looking up anxiously and appealingly to John.

John was utterly nonplussed at Carey's recital. There was something very gravely wrong, and he knew that something which affected Hester very seriously was being kept from him. Could it be the gossip in Dorset which Carey had brought home the day before? or was it something farther back in her life? He had not forgotten that she was anxious and depressed at times.

John was more disturbed and uneasy than he had ever been in his life. He said to the child,—

"Carey, slip up-stairs and ask Hester to see me, if only for a few minutes, and tell her I send her this with all my heart." And he bent and kissed Carey's lips. Then he waited impatiently while she went sedately away with his message. She came back speedily, and said,—

"It's no use, John; sister can't get up to-day, she's all sort of trembly; but she says she will see you to-morrow, and she sends you this." And she gravely kissed John twice.

It was evident that Carey felt herself a very important and responsible messenger, and until she had fully discharged her mission she was all gravity and sedateness. John was forced to be satisfied with this greeting by proxy.

But Hester did not see him the next day, nor for two or three days besides. There came a note from her, saying that Mr. Willetts had arrived at Chapel House, and she had important matters to close up which could not be delayed, and she begged him to await a summons from her which should be sent to him as soon as Mr. Willetts was gone.

This was the first note John had received from Hester since their engagement, and he turned it over and over with disappointment, it

was so meagre. He was beginning to feel very intolerant of Mr. Willetts and this ever-encroaching business. Meantime, while waiting eagerly for Hester's summons, he received something much less welcome, which came upon him with more or less of shock. It was an anonymous letter in the usual cut-and-dried form, from "a well-wisher," and contained the usual stereotyped warning, and the warning was against Mrs. Brent.

As John crushed it in his hands with an oath, he wondered who had written it; whether it was from some enemy of Hester's or from an enemy of his own. It was evidently from some one who knew that he could be struck by striking at Mrs. Brent. He recalled the tale Carey had brought from Dorset, and the horrified expression on Hester's face. His rage found vent in vigorous swearing as he stormed up and down.

"It comes from some infernal old hag in Dorset," he muttered; and he was more determined than ever to marry Hester at once. It was all he could do to keep from going to Dorset and knocking down the entire village, which, if it would not make matters any better, would at least satisfy the rage within him. And then he received the anxiously awaited summons from Hester, which took him promptly to Chapel House.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN John saw Hester again he was shocked to notice that her face was nearly as white as her gown; and he immediately proceeded to kiss some color into her cheeks and lips and to bring some light to her eyes. But there was a singular unresponsiveness about her which soon impressed him. There could be no doubt about it, Hester was changed; her efforts to be natural were spasmodic and distressed him inexpressibly. And gradually John grew grave. He watched her nervous manner and the changing expressions of her face, and he wondered within himself. Finally he said,—

"You are changed, Hester. What is the matter?"

"I have been nervously ill for a day or two, and under a strain about business; that is all," said she, endeavoring to speak lightly.

John considered for a moment, then said,—

"No, Hester, that is not it. You are not happy. You cannot deceive me. This change has only come since our engagement. Shall I release you?" And John straightened himself.

"Oh, John, you do not understand in the least. I will not be released; I don't want to be; and I will marry you any day next week that you may name," said she, hurriedly. And she looked squarely at him.

John was not proof against this. All idea of releasing her from her promise vanished, and it looked for a time as if all idea of releasing her from his arms had vanished as well. But he said presently, coming back to the idea which had taken possession of him,—

"Hester, you are concealing something from me. I have known for some time that you have some worry or trouble that is harassing

you, and which I ought to know. You owe it to yourself and to me not to let anything stand between us." John looked very grave as he searched her face with his keen, direct eyes.

But Hester's face bore a look of absolute truth. She said, quietly,—

"John, I have only one reply to make: I ask you to trust me."

There was a pause; then he said, slowly, "I will trust you." And immediately on uttering the words the contents of the anonymous letter flashed into his mind, to be at once put aside in mental contempt. After a moment he asked,—

"Which day next week shall be our wedding-day, Hester?"

"Name it yourself, John," she replied.

"Then let it be Wednesday," he said, and added, questioningly, "And the hour, Hester?"

"Four o'clock," she mechanically replied. John waited for her to add something a little more definite, but she said nothing. So he finally asked,—

"And the place, Hester?"

"St. Paul's Church in town," she said, as if repeating a well-conned lesson.

"St. Paul's Church?" he repeated, in surprise, staring at her as if he thought she had surely made some mistake. He had been picturing a simple scene with a few solemn words spoken in the old Chapel Room which should unite him to Hester, but St. Paul's was quite a startling idea: it brought visions of fuss and pomp and dreary crowds.

"Well, John, upon thinking it over, I prefer to go off quietly to town with only you and Mr. Willetts."

"Mr. Willetts?" John interrupted. There seemed no end to the surprises.

"Yes, Mr. Willetts; he is the best friend I have had, and I cannot be married unless he is present. I want to have an absolutely quiet, unheralded wedding, you see," said she, trying to laugh lightly and not succeeding very well; "I could not stand all the eyes and tongues of Dorset. I want to escape them, which I couldn't do if we are married here. I want no favors, no bouquets, no wedding-breakfast, no trousseau: in fact, I only want you, John," she wound up, tremulously. Hester well knew where the last appeal would find lodgement and how it would be received. And she did not reckon in vain. He replied,—

"Very well: our wedding shall be as you please. I don't care, so long as we are married. But you will at least allow me some part in the license and the ring? and I may surely accompany you to town on this occasion?"

Hester looked nervous, and replied, without meeting his eyes,—

"Well, John, I had planned to have you meet me in town. I do not care to have anybody know of this till we are really married,—not even Carey and Aunt Jenifer. I thought we would meet at three o'clock; Mr. Willetts will be with me, and then we three can go to the church in time for our wedding at four."

"We are eloping, then, as I understand it, Hester?" John asked, gravely; for there was something in the arrangements that did not fit

in with his ideas of openness. The question and the tone in which it was asked brought a look of distress to Hester's face. She said, in a quick, positive way, but with a break in her voice,—

"Heaven knows I'd like to have it very different if I could, but I am not placed like other women. And oh, John, don't make it any harder for me than you need."

There was such genuine appeal in her voice and manner that John felt that, no matter what extraordinary arrangement or condition she might ask him to submit to, he should accept it. He had long recognized that Hester was a highly-strung woman, prone to take a morbid view of things, and he knew that she had some exaggerated idea about this second marriage which he could not understand. He must blink the fact that something was being kept from him. He must put up with St. Paul's, with Mr. Willets, and with the rest of the queer arrangement. He was being managed, and he wondered what there was in this slight, pale woman that had so completely subjugated him.

Hester had been watching his face for a few minutes. As he did not answer, she said, with a touch of coquetry in her manner and eyes, and trying to imitate him as he had spoken awhile before,—

"What is the matter, John? You are unhappy. Shall I release you?" And she straightened herself as he had done when he had asked the same question of her.

He recognized his own words and manner, and his gravity was instantly dispelled. He laughed out suddenly in protest, and said, with a tone of earnestness in his voice,—

"I won't say another word about your arrangements. If you elect to have the ceremony in the middle of Charles Street, I will meet you there, or anywhere else, without a murmur. I promise to be a most tractable man until Wednesday; then beware after that how you try to manage me, for I am not always a patient man, Hester."

Hester laughed with confidence at John's promised submission and threatened revolt all in the same breath. She knew that he was yielding to her only for the time being,—that he would not tolerate for long the present situation. If his will were once aroused, she had a pretty clear conviction as to which of them would have to give way.

But Hester had no fear of clashing wills; it was only the next few days which concerned her; and when John promised to agree with all her arrangements for the present, she was relieved and grateful. The color came to her lips, the light to her eyes, and youth to her entire face. She sat on the old-fashioned settle and looked the very embodiment of careless happy girlhood; or so John thought as he sat beside her, gazing at her with his dark head bent close to hers.

When Aunt Jenifer, fresh from her nap, bustled into the room late in the afternoon and saw John sitting in the same place and almost in the same attitude of devotion that she had observed surreptitiously earlier in the day, she said, bluntly, when he did not move, nor even appear disturbed, at her entrance,—

"Land sakes alive, John, I hope you an' Hester are goin' to settle matters soon, for I've been rattlin' door-latches for more'n two months,

an' I'm tired of it. Now I'd like to know when you two are goin' to be married?—I can just tell you, Hester, if you could know all that's bein' said up yonder in Dorset, you'd marry John right off. There ain't any one left, I guess, in the whole village that I haven't had a set-to with; but when they tackled Caroline Jenifer they tackled the wrong person. I just told the entire community to mind its business,—that we could settle our own affairs."

John glanced at Hester, but the only expression on her face was half amusement, half contempt. She said,—

"Never mind, Aunt Jenifer; John and I are going to settle our affairs in our own way and at our own time, and we are not going to take Dorset into our confidence, either. They have already poured their gossip into Carey's ears, and I am sorry that you too have been annoyed. You must bear with it a little longer. Perhaps we shall surprise you sooner than you anticipate."

Aunt Jenifer looked relieved. She knew that Hester would not speak in such a positive tone if some decision had not already been reached. But there was one burning question still that she wanted to ask: it was the same question that Carey had asked:

"John, where do you an' Hester mean to live? I hope you won't separate the family. This old place is surely big enough to hold us all," she said, with a quaver in her voice.

"When the time comes, Miss Caroline, I hope Hester will go with me to The Farm; I shall never feel sure of her till I have her all to myself under my own roof; but we shall stay there only just so long as she pleases," he said, looking at her for consent. The flash of her eyes in answer evidently satisfied him fully; but Aunt Jenifer looked alarmed, and John, noticing it, continued, quietly,—

"I shall never ask Hester to leave Chapel House permanently. The old place is historic and indissolubly linked with the Jenifer name, and I realize that it ought to be held by the Jenifers. It will not make much difference to me where I fix my habitation."

Aunt Jenifer looked entirely relieved, and smiled on them both benignly. Then, unable to let well enough alone, she said to John,—

"The last time Hester was married, the whole place was turned inside out; an' do you remember how mad you got, Hester, 'cause your mother cried durin' the service?"

She turned to Hester for confirmation. But the look on Hester's face suddenly froze her, and it crossed her mind that she was not happy in her reminiscence. She became very much flustered, and said, in her helpless way,—

"Well! well! What have I said, to be sure?" And she bustled out of the room with a half-nervous cough and shut the door with a bang.

John and Hester were left staring at each other, with half-comic despair in their eyes. Each of them was wondering if there would ever be an end to the changes rung upon Hester's unfortunate first marriage. And, try as they would, they neither of them could get back to the happy mood which had preceded Aunt Jenifer's descent upon them with her remarks and untimely reminiscence.

CHAPTER XVII.

HESTER could never afterwards remember how the rest of that week was spent. She felt that she was leading two distinct lives,—one in John's presence, happy, and apparently free from care, the other, when his back was turned, filled with sleepless nights, in which the long hours were spent in reviewing various hurried arrangements which certainly bore no resemblance to wedding preparations. So great was the pressure on her during these days that she felt that if it were suddenly removed from her she should go all to pieces, and there would be a heavy reckoning with Nature.

Mr. Willetts came and was closeted with her, and their conversation was carried on in low tones behind a carefully closed door in which the key had been turned. And a telegram, in an aggressive yellow envelope, had been brought over from the station by a special messenger on horseback; and Lemuel had driven the stage up to the house and dumped down a box, the contents of which Carey hoped to have a glimpse of. But she saw it hopelessly consigned to Hester's big press without even being opened; although, had the child but known, it contained nothing more mysterious than a frock or two for Hester. But all these things, combined with a subtle, indefinable something in the air, kept the household in a suppressed ferment.

John came and went at all hours. There was nothing to mar the days for him. If occasionally a harassed look came to Hester's face, it was so soon gone that he forbore to speak of it or to feel any uneasiness because of it. There was but one ever-present thing in his mind: Hester would marry him on Wednesday. Nothing else on the whole broad earth was of any importance beside this fact. So the week wore away to its close.

The weather, which had been cold and dry, with high winds sweeping from the northwest, became damp, and a light snow began to fall which continued all day Sunday, and before night it had become a heavy storm, with no indication of abating. Everybody was suddenly reminded of the fact that with the advent of December winter had come, and it is safe to say that no one was pleased with this reminder save Carey.

John had spent a part of the day at Chapel House, and it had not been a very satisfactory time to him, for there had been an ever-present, ever-steady audience. When it was not Aunt Jenifer and her blunt remarks, it was Carey and the dog inquisitively hanging about. He had made up his mind that he should soon inaugurate a new order of things, and had just said as much to Hester, when she, with a half-amused, half-worried air, announced to him that for the next two or three days—in fact, until the appointed hour on Wednesday—she would not be able to see him again. John looked so surprised and disbelieving that she explained it in a light, matter-of-fact way:

"I hope you won't mind it very much, John, but I have so much to do that every moment after to-day is taken up with important things. You see, a woman who is going to be married has so many little things to do of which a man knows nothing, and I shall not

have a moment to myself." She looked at him persuasively, but with a touch of uneasiness in her manner. John regarded her a moment. He had not forgotten that there lurked something in their wedding arrangements that was unaccounted for. He said, slowly,—

"You mean that I am not to see you again until you meet me at the altar?"

"Yes," she replied.

"But you will of course tell me by what train you will go to town Wednesday?" he asked.

"I don't know just when I shall reach town on Wednesday, John; but that is of no importance, if I am there at three o'clock to meet you."

John got up with quick impetuosity, and said, abruptly,—

"There's something devilish queer in all this." Then he stopped suddenly as he caught the expression on her face. She had shrunk from his words and his tone as if from a blow. He controlled his irritation at once, and came back to her side and said, quietly,—

"You know that we men never understand anything but plain, straightforward arrangements, Hester; and if I am impatient it is because I see no reason why we should be so secret about our marriage."

Hester did not reply. She thought that she was paying the penalty for trying to eat her cake and have it too; and she wondered cynically if, after all, she might not wake up to find that it hadn't been worth while. John was watching her face. There was something in it that baffled him. It seemed to him as if Hester were weighing the situation in her mind, and that she might suddenly determine to give it all up and him as well. He drew her closely to him and said gravely, as he looked questioningly into her eyes,—

"You are not sure of yourself, Hester?"

"I wish I were as sure of you, John, as I am of myself," was her emphatic reply.

"I cannot imagine any situation in life, Hester, where I should be likely to fail you," John said, quickly. And then he added, "I feel a reluctance to-night to leave you. But perhaps it is because of your singular probation." His face wore an expression of doubt as he kept her closely in his arms.

As the time of parting came, it seemed as if he could not go. He went back again after he had said a last good-night, and when finally he stepped out into the blustering storm it seemed to him that he was stepping into a world of uncertainty. He rode through the blinding, whirling snow almost without noticing or feeling it; and when he dismounted before his own door and his man took his horse, with the remark, "It's a bad night, sir," John scarcely heard him, and replied quite at random. Afterwards, when he was seated before his own fire, he entirely ignored Aunt Polly's attempts to make him comfortable, although she set his tobacco and decanter on the table with unusual quickness and asked "if she should make him something hot." But he paid no attention to her; he was reviewing his engagement with Hester, he was recalling various ambiguous words of hers that were

half evasions, half admissions of some secret worry, and he was thinking of her instructions to him for Wednesday, which were most minute and complete in so far as they touched him and his part in the day's proceedings, but there was not one word of her own movements, beyond the bald fact that she would meet him at three o'clock and would marry him at four. Perhaps that ought to be enough for him, but somehow it was not.

Meanwhile the lights at Chapel House had been put out, and the household was wrapped in silence and darkness, all save Hester. She was still up, and was moving quietly about her room. She had gathered up some of her belongings and was packing them in a small trunk, into which, among other things, had gone one of the new frocks which Carey had been so curious about. Then she packed a travelling-bag and laid out a plain black gown, ready for use. Now and then in her work she stopped to listen to the flurries of snow that were hurled against the window-panes by the fierce wind which whistled and moaned uncannily in the big chimney and rattled the windows all over the silent house. After she had finished her packing, she took a lighted candle and stepped into the cold, frosty room where Carey was asleep. She gazed at the child, and was struck with the resemblance to herself. It was as if she were looking at her own youth. She bent over her lightly to push away the tangled yellow hair, when suddenly Carey sat bolt upright and exclaimed, crossly,—

"You're always prowlin' round in the night, sister, an' you've gone an' dropped some hot can'le-grease on my face, an' I wish you'd just let me alone."

"I thought I heard you moving in here, Carey; I didn't mean to wake you up. There, go to sleep again, little sister," said Hester, meekly; and she bent down and lightly kissed the child. To her surprise, Carey's arms went up about her neck, and a sleepy, careless little kiss was pressed upon her face. Then the child buried herself in her pillow, and before Hester left the room she was fathoms deep in sleep.

When Hester went back to her room, it was with a sense of thankfulness that she had at last won Carey's careless affection.

Monday morning dawned bitingly, stinging cold. There was a leaden sky overhead, and spotless unbroken snow as far as eye could reach. John began the day by a tour over his premises. Then he turned his attention to overhauling the accumulation of business papers,—surveyors' estimates, engineering contracts, bills, specifications, in short, every sort of thing that had any bearing upon his business. These he sorted and filed or tore up, as the case required; and yet when he was done the day was only two-thirds gone. He read the daily papers, and at last, in desperation, buried himself in a knotty, troublesome problem that he had been working over for some time, which had baffled him persistently. It was finally with a sigh of relief that he found himself at the end of his first day of probation.

By Tuesday morning the weather had changed again, and for the worse. A rain, half hail, half sleet, came down slowly and steadily, and formed a coating of ice upon everything it touched. This, on top

of the half-melted snow, made the pike and the roads almost impassable, and neither man nor beast could travel thereon with safety. John sent his man with a horse to the blacksmith's in Dorset to have it rough-shod, in anticipation of his trip to the station. When the man came back later in the day, he brought the mail-bag, and John found a budget of papers and letters, among which was a fateful communication. It was a second anonymous letter, bolder than the previous one, and containing specific information against Mrs. Brent. It bore no heading, but was postmarked from town. It charged Mrs. Brent with having masqueraded as a widow for the past year, while all the time Colonel Brent had been alive and shut up in a retreat for incurables somewhere in Switzerland; Colonel Brent had died only two or three weeks ago, Mrs. Brent having sent to Europe for his remains, which were to be interred at Brent; the exact day and hour could not be ascertained, for great secrecy was being maintained, but the writer knew positively that Brent had been opened for the first time in years to receive Mrs. Brent, and that the family vault had also been opened and was ready for the remains of the late Colonel Brent. If Mr. Cecil wanted to ascertain the truth of the information he could either proceed at once to Brent and see for himself, or apply to Mr. Willetts, Mrs. Brent's lawyer. This was the statement, boldly and curtly made in the letter.

John stood holding it in his hand. He could not have described the feeling or sensation that gripped him; he could not tell what was uppermost in his mind, whether it was disbelief, a sense of outrage, or entire conviction. One thing was clear, he could not remain passive and inactive; he would go at once to Hester, and, in spite of her prohibition, he would see her and ask for an explanation of her half-concealed agitation and worry. He would not let her know of the anonymous letter, which, wretched and unknown as its source was, he could not ignore.

Quick to act, he gave an imperative order to have the horse put to the cart, to have the hood drawn up and the rubber blanket buttoned on, and to have them ready for him when he came back from Chapel House: he should go to town that afternoon, in all probability. And, with orders to Aunt Polly to have his "things" packed, John hurriedly equipped himself and started for Chapel House. The walk and the battle with the elements at every step cooled the blood in his veins, and before he reached the house he was almost ready to laugh in contempt at the letter and its contents. He wondered how he should account for his presence to Hester. Once he nearly turned back, but something urged him on.

When he opened the familiar sitting-room door it was to find Aunt Jenifer and Carey sitting dully before the fire. They started up in pleasure at sight of John, who hastily said, as he advanced to the fire,—

"It's a beastly day to be out, but I want to see Hester about something important."

"Why, John, Hester went away yesterday mornin' about eleven o'clock, an' won't be back for some days: didn't she tell you?" said Aunt Jenifer, in surprise.

John did not move a muscle of his face. He replied, in an every-day tone,—

“Oh! then she went sooner than she expected: I knew she was going to town to-morrow, and it was about that I wanted to see her. Well, I must be off; I’m in a hurry.” John would ask no questions: he would betray to no one the blow he had received.

“I’m glad you know all about it, John,” said Aunt Jenifer, in a relieved tone, “for I thought it mighty queer in Hester to go off with a trunk, in such a storm as this, to be gone some time, an’ tellin’ no one where she was goin’ or when she was comin’ back. Somethin’s been goin’ on in this house for a week that I don’t like the looks of. But of course it’s all right so long as you know about it.”

John stood a moment considering. He felt that there was nothing to be learned here, and he now understood why Hester had said that she could not see him: she would be absent, and she did not want him to know it. He hurried out into the sleet and rain, and as he made his way home he debated what his next step should be. Hester’s unexplained absence from home on the eve of her marriage with him, her agitation and unmistakable nervousness, all had a meaning, which made it impossible for him to rest quietly and wait for an explanation; he must seek it from Mr. Willetts. He lost no time, and inside of an hour he was on his way over the slippery roads to the station, and never was there a more uncomfortable journey for man or beast. He missed the first afternoon train, and when he finally reached town he was afraid that Mr. Willetts’ office would be closed. By this time he had a shrewd idea that if Hester had gone to Brent, Mr. Willetts had gone too; but it was by no means sure that either of them had gone to Brent.

When he entered Mr. Willetts’ office there was an air of desertion about it that seemed to proclaim that the lawyer himself was away, and had not been there for some time. Mr. Willetts’ confidential clerk, who was writing at a desk, laid down his pen and wheeled around in his chair at John’s approach. John had determined suddenly upon a bold course. He addressed himself to the clerk with perfect assurance, and with apparently perfect knowledge of the absence of the chief:

“I have an important appointment with Mr. Willetts for three o’clock to-morrow; it is connected with the business which took him and his client out of town yesterday morning, and I am anxious to know the result of the business. Have you heard anything from him? or do you expect him back before to-morrow?”

“No, sir; he said that on account of the bad roads and the inaccessibility of the place to which he was called he might be delayed in getting back to-morrow. He mentioned to me an important engagement which he and his client have made for to-morrow: so I presume that you are Mr.—” And the clerk paused a moment before mentioning the name, and looked inquiringly at John; he did not want to be indiscreet or to make a mistake.

“Mr. Cecil,” said John, quickly supplying his name: “I am the man with whom Mr. Willetts and his client have an important engagement to-morrow.”

The clerk was entirely reassured. He had typewritten various letters lately in which Mr. Cecil's and Mrs. Brent's names had occurred, and he felt that it was safe to give some slight information to one of the most interested parties, who of course knew the whole business that had called Mr. Willetts out of town. So he said,—

"I am expecting Mr. Willetts and Mrs. Brent back about one o'clock to-morrow. You know, of course, sir, that Brent is an out-of-the-way place, with no railroad station, and I think the arrangements are to have the interment take place early to-morrow morning, for I am sure the remains came from Europe some days ago. All this you are better informed about than I, but with the long drive afterwards to the station and the bad roads there may be a delay. I am sure, though, that they will be here by three o'clock. Your appointment is at Renner's, is it not?"

"Yes," said John, in a voice that sounded little like his; but he was composed and bore himself without flinching.

The worst had been confirmed: some part at least of the anonymous letter was true. Hester was going to bury her first husband in the morning and marry him in the afternoon; and he clinched his hands at the thought. He wondered if the world had gone suddenly mad, or was he mad? He managed to exchange a few more words with the clerk, then he made his way blindly down-stairs into the open air. He walked briskly up one street, and down another, and around the Monument, without knowing where he was going, until he was thoroughly soaked. Then he turned his footsteps mechanically to a hotel, where he locked himself in a dreary room. And with a sense of outraged love, and with every element of his nature at war within him, John spent the eve of his wedding.

CHAPTER XVIII.

No sleep visited John Cecil that night. He passed in this dingy hotel room the bitterest hours that he had ever known in his life. His mind was so concentrated upon the situation, he was so absorbed in groping for some possible rational explanation of it, that he remained almost in one position for hours. Instead of pacing restlessly up and down, as was his wont, he sat with his head and arms resting upon the table, and never had a night been so long.

When daylight struggled feebly and murkily into his room, he found himself cramped and numb. As he threw open the blind and gazed out into the dreary street, he asked himself if any man had ever looked upon such a wedding morning before, with such a bitter conflict raging in his heart; and he wondered how the day was going to end. Never did it occur to him to retire from the scene, as perhaps he would have been justified in doing. There was under his distress and doubt a strong hope that there was some explanation which he could with dignity accept.

When mid-day was well past and only a short time remained before the appointed hour, John came out of the hotel for the first time that

day. He was dressed with the most fastidious care; there was even the conventional wedding-flower in his coat, but there was a grim, hard expression on his face that did not fit with wedding-favors. He looked little like a bridegroom; he would have been mistaken rather for a man who was going forth to meet his doom. He called a carriage and was driven rapidly to Rennert's. When he reached there he gave his card to a man and asked to be shown to Mrs. Brent's drawing-room. The man glanced at the card and seemed to understand. He said, promptly, "This way, sir." John's heart throbbed. Hester was perhaps already there and awaiting him. Perhaps there lurked in the next half-hour a revelation that would change all things to him for all time, or perhaps only a few simple words would at once dispel this nightmare of apprehension. But the end of his uncertainty was not yet. He was ushered into a showy room which was empty; the man vanished, and he was left alone.

This room was the usual hotel drawing-room, one of a suite, commonplace and dreary. The windows looked out upon the narrow, slippery street below, which presented nothing more pleasing to the eyes than the tops of myriads of dripping umbrellas.

John glanced around hurriedly; his eyes took in every detail and every belonging, and came back to remain fixedly upon a magnificent bunch of violets that was upon the table and to which was attached a card bearing the words "For Mrs. Brent."

He instinctively felt that he had entered upon a long wait, and one that would be in vain. As the minutes flew by and no one came, his anxiety grew upon him; his carefully guarded composure gave place to open irritation. He felt that the whole situation was a humiliation, and an outrage upon his dignity. Sometimes, when a carriage dashed up to the hotel, he would glance out, but it was never Hester who alighted. At last he touched the bell-button and summoned a man, to whom he said, peremptorily,—

"Go to the office and ask if there is any letter, or telegram, or even message, for Mr. Cecil. If there is nothing, ask the clerk if he knows whether Mrs. Brent has been here to-day."

The man disappeared, and soon came back with the information that there was neither letter, telegram, nor message for Mr. Cecil; that a suite of rooms had been engaged for Mrs. Brent, but that she had not yet arrived.

John, with a darkening face, turned back to the empty, silent room, with its suggestions of Hester on the table. The stillness was occasionally broken by a coal dropping from the grate, or by the sound of the clock as it persistently ticked the wrong minutes and struck the wrong hour. He determined that he would wait till the whole of that wretched hour was gone before he proceeded to the next appointed place of meeting, where, to tell the truth, he expected no better luck. He took out his watch and held it in his hand and grimly waited for it to point to four o'clock, and when the last of the sixty minutes was finally up he shut it with a snap, picked up his coat and hat, and hurried down-stairs. The clerk asked, as he passed the office, if he would leave any message for Mrs. Brent if she arrived, and he

replied, shortly, "No." He threw himself into the waiting carriage, and as he banged the door he said curtly to the driver, "Go to St. Paul's Church, and drive like hell;" but the roughness of the sentence was lost in the banging of the door and the rattle of the cobble-stones.

A few minutes later his carriage dashed up to the church door. He sprang out and hurried in. A rapid glance around told him that no one was there. The sexton came forward, and said, politely,—

"Will you not come to the vestry, sir, and wait? The rest of the party have not arrived."

John thought of the gloomy vestry, with the eyes of the rector fixed upon him, and he thought also of the conventional exchange of greetings and the polite conversation that would ensue to fill in the time, and shrank from the ordeal. He decided that he preferred to wait in the body of the church, or even in the vestibule, rather than encounter the rector. The church was already lighted, and he noticed that some splendid roses were fastened to the chancel rail. He smiled derisively, for the lighted church, the rector, and the roses might prove altogether superfluous. He paced up and down one of the aisles, pausing at every step or two to listen. Once the rector looked out from the door of the vestry. He held his watch in his hand and seemed perplexed and disturbed; this was a strangely arranged wedding to him, and the delay was unaccountable, for the appointed hour was already twenty minutes gone. He had another special service before long.

At last, when even the sexton began to move about restlessly and to make frequent trips to look up and down the street, a furious rattle of wheels was heard in the near distance. They approached and stopped before the door. The rector disappeared into the vestry to put on his vestments. John, with his face deadly pale and an ominous light in his eyes, strode to the vestibule to meet Hester and to force from her some explanation before they went to the altar. As the door swung behind him, Hester and Mr. Willetts entered the vestibule from the opposite door, and these three people, all unmistakably excited, confronted one another.

As soon as Hester saw John's set face and the straight line of his lips she knew that her mission to Brent was known, and it only needed this to make the day the most wretched in her whole life. His face wrung her heart. She wanted to cry out to explain her blamelessness. She stretched out her hands to him in an imploring way, but his face was as hard as a flint, and fierce anger burned in his eyes. She could frame no words; she could only make a half-articulate sound. She was pale, dragged, and exhausted. There was the print of a muddy wheel upon the skirt of her gown, her hair was rumpled and damp upon her forehead, and her face had no more color than John's. Mr. Willetts looked anxiously from her distressed face to John's blazing eyes. He stepped forward to say something to break the dreadful silence, but John, without heeding him, advanced suddenly to Hester, and, in a voice that was harsh and strange even in his own ears, said,—

"Can you explain matters before we go any farther, Hester?"

"Yes, John, yes; I am really blameless, only an unfortunate victim,

as you will see," she said, huskily. Then her voice broke, and she could not go on. She again stretched out her hand, but John rushed on sternly,—

"Is it true that you buried Colonel Brent this morning?"

"Yes, it is true," she said, humbly, looking at him imploringly and trying again to add something. But at this reply of hers John suddenly lost all control of himself. He did not hear what else she said; the veins stood out on his temples, and his voice rang with unconscious scorn as he interposed,—

"You would bury one husband in the morning and then marry another in the afternoon?"

This stung Hester to the quick. The color sprang to her face, and the fire to her eyes. She flung up her head quickly, and said,—

"No, John, I would not marry another in the afternoon." Then she turned to Mr. Willetts, and said, haughtily,—

"Mr. Willetts, there will be no wedding to-day: will you kindly notify the rector?"

She turned swiftly to the door, as if to go. John strode rapidly to her side. There was a mingling of fierce love and fiercer rage in his face. He laid a rough, detaining hand upon Hester and tried to say something, but in his agitation it was indistinguishable, and it died on his lips altogether when Mr. Willetts stepped suddenly between them and said,—

"I entreat you to listen to reason, both of you."

There was a ring of authoritative pleading in his voice which stayed them and held them silent. John put an iron restraint upon the passion that possessed him. He relaxed the tension of his hands, dropped them at his side, and stepped back. He was suddenly recalled to himself, and trembled at the rage and excitement that had controlled him. Mr. Willetts laid a kindly hand upon each of them, and said, quietly,—

"This marriage must take place now, at once. We all three came here for this purpose, and nothing has happened that should prevent it." Then he turned directly to John, and said, in a tone that carried conviction,—

"Mr. Cecil, I pledge you my professional honor that there is no reason to interrupt this marriage. Mrs. Brent is the bravest, truest woman I ever met. She is entirely blameless. It was solely upon my advice that she has kept a secret from you. She has only been carrying out the eccentric will of Colonel Brent, all of which I can satisfactorily——" But Mr. Willetts got no further, for here the sexton flung open the doors, and said, anxiously,—

"The rector says will you please to come, for he has a special service at five o'clock, and it is a quarter to five now."

Mr. Willetts looked appealingly from one to the other of these sorely tried people, who seemed on the verge of wrecking their own happiness. He stepped from between them; he could do no more; they would have to settle it themselves. The sexton held open the doors, through which down the vista of the church could be seen the gowned rector, with open book, waiting for them.

During these few seconds John had regained complete mastery of himself. He was composed and quiet; there must be no further scene. He advanced to Hester, held out his hand, and said, in a voice from which the anger was gone,—

"Come, Hester."

Hester suddenly covered her face with her hands; all her pride was trailing in the dust. Her nerve and courage had disappeared; her frame shook with suppressed nervous excitement. John noticed it. He said again, hurriedly,—

"Come, Hester."

Hester dropped her hands from her face. She looked at Mr. Willets, encountering in his eyes both pity and entreaty. She glanced at the open door and the waiting clergyman, and saw the plainly expressed curiosity of the sexton. Then she looked steadily into John's face, the meaning of which she could not read. It presented an impenetrable mask, and in her despairing heart she felt that his love was dead. He quietly lifted her trembling hand, drew it within his arm, and said, for the third time,—

"Come, Hester." And, as she did not move, he added,—

"I am strong enough for us both."

Hester mechanically stepped forward, and as she did so Mr. Willets felt an intense relief. Something in John's bearing and the manner in which he had controlled his fierce anger impressed Mr. Willets with the belief that he meant to be master of his fate and of Hester's too.

Without another word this strange wedding-party advanced to the altar. And not even the solemn words of the marriage service could wholly subdue the agitation of the two who were making their pledges. John made his responses in an even, firm voice. When Hester was making hers, she trembled so that he put his arm about her, or she would have fallen.

Poor Hester had scarcely sensed anything from the time she put her hand on John's arm. Everything was whirling before her eyes; the words of the marriage service sounded far off. She could only barely make her responses. The lights were dancing about in an unaccountable way. Now they had faded out completely, and there seemed to be a shower of little sparkling stars all about her. Was it night? Was she out of doors? No, she was in church. This was John beside her: was it John, though? it looked like some one else; no, it wasn't Robert, for she had buried Robert that morning,—she remembered all about it, and how she had jolted over the cobble-stones trying to get here to the church in time. And now the clergyman was in front of her; she could see his white gown; he was just going to pronounce the benediction. The wedding was all over at last; she was shaking hands with the rector, but it was odd that he had no face, only a voice. And what was the matter with John and the congregation? Where were Mr. Willets and everybody? Where had they all disappeared to? and why was she left to grope her way all alone down the aisle, or rather up the aisle?—for it was up-hill all the way, and she must be careful or she would step on

her wedding-gown and stumble before everybody. The organ was playing a deafening thing; she never heard such roaring, rushing music before; it drowned everything else. At last it had stopped, the lights were out, and suddenly everything was blotted out to her in reality.

All during the latter part of the service John had kept a supporting arm around Hester. He noticed her groping, uncertain steps on their way to the altar, and her stumble as she missed the step when they passed the reading-desk. He heard her faltering responses during the service, and it was with a thankful heart that he heard the benediction at last pronounced. But he should never to his dying day forget her face when she turned from the altar. He guided her carefully out of the church, with Mr. Willetts following, and scarcely had they passed into the vestibule and the doors had swung behind them, when, without a sound, Hester had thrown her hands out spasmodically and had fallen forward, to be caught in John's arms. To his inexperienced eyes she was dead; he was about to utter some frantic cry for help, when Mr. Willetts said, in a low voice,—

"For God's sake, pick her up quickly in your arms; keep quiet, and come out this way."

Mr. Willetts had spoken imperatively. He wanted to save these two people from any publicity; there had already been enough that was sensational in the events of the day.

John gathered Hester in his arms silently. Mr. Willetts held the big outside doors open for him, and he bore her out to the waiting carriage. They lifted her in, the two men followed, the door was shut, and they drove away. And none too soon; for several people were passing into the church and were casting curious glances at the vanishing carriage.

John held Hester's unconscious face against his breast. He was trying to chafe her cold hands, and was wondering with anguish if this was the ending to his wedding-day. He had not thought even to inquire where they were being driven.

Mr. Willetts leaned forward and said, after they had driven several squares,—

"Mr. Cecil, our best plan is to go back to Rennert's, where everything is prepared for your return, and where Mrs. Brent's, or rather your wife's, luggage is already waiting. When we arrive I will speak to the clerk, and we will get a doctor at once, and, if need be, a nurse also. I have feared this break-down; it may, however, be only a fainting-fit, or hysteria."

John did not make any answer beyond assent; it was impossible for him to talk. He was thinking of the night he had stayed at Chapel House when Hester had fainted after coming from town, and then he thought of all the wretchedness of the past twenty-four hours, and the fierce passion that had controlled him when he met Hester at the door of the church, and the scene that followed. She was now his wife. She was unconscious, and there was still between them something to be explained. His reflections were interrupted by Mr. Willetts leaning forward and speaking again. John wondered if this man had been

reading his face in the occasional flashes of light from the lamp-posts, for it seemed an answer to his thoughts :

"If you knew, Mr. Cecil, all that Mrs. Brent has endured since Monday in order that she might marry you to-day ! She has been exposed to cold and fatigue since early this morning. She has eaten nothing, and has scarcely slept, for three days. She has been subjected to a terrible strain for some weeks, and she has been entirely blameless throughout. I will give you the whole story, and I think you will be entirely satisfied. The only point open to criticism is the secrecy that has been maintained, and that, after all, is more a matter of judgment than anything else." There was no further talk, and they rattled along, square after square, till at last the hotel was reached.

Thanks to Mr. Willetts' cool head and quick management, Hester was carried to the suite of rooms which had been all day in readiness for her ; and so quietly was it done that no one but the clerk and one or two bell-boys was the wiser. When John came to relinquish her to the care of others, he felt as if he could not let her go ; he held her tightly in his arms while he kissed her pinched, unconscious face, then he reluctantly gave her up. Mr. Willetts walked away a little ; he had never felt so sorry for any one in his life as he did for John Cecil, whose haggard face, with its marks of fatigue and anxiety, made him feel that there would be no peace and rest for him until the entire history of the past few days and all that had led up to the events at the church were put before him.

It was not long before the doctor turned both Mr. Willetts and John out of the room and shut the door upon them ; and the two men looked as helpless and superfluous as men usually do under such circumstances. They faced each other for a moment ; then the lawyer said, cheerfully,—

"Come with me, Mr. Cecil ; let us get a biscuit or two, and something to drink, and then we will go to my office, where we can talk without disturbing any one. By the time I have given you the details of this queer story, the doctor no doubt will have a good report for you."

John lingered a moment outside the door which had just been shut upon him and which separated him from Hester. He hesitated, then followed Mr. Willetts slowly down-stairs.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE two men were quickly driven to Mr. Willetts' office. The lawyer let himself in with his pass-key, and John gropingly followed him into the dark room. A gas-jet was soon lighted, and Mr. Willetts walked over to a big safe, where he went through the usual mysterious turning of knobs which is always accompanied by some mystic mental process that invariably proves an open sesame. As he took out some papers and searched through them, he said,—

"I had hoped, Mr. Cecil, for a very different ending to this day. I did not think it would fall to me to relate to you the curious tangle in

which Colonel Brent's will has involved you. It had been set down in the programme that Mrs. Brent should tell you this story and give you the history of the past few days."

"There are only two points of any real vital interest to me, Mr. Willetts: one is, when did Colonel Brent die? the other is, why should there have been an interment of his remains on this day, of all days, at Brent?"

Mr. Willetts turned towards him in evident surprise, and said, quickly, "Why, I thought you knew that Colonel Brent died a year ago the 20th of last August, and was buried in St. Moritz."

"Yes, I did hear it; but the events of to-day were calculated to upset any such belief," replied John, shortly.

"Well, here is a copy of the will Colonel Brent left, one clause of which alone is the cause of to-day's queer events. Read it carefully."

He folded the document so that one long paragraph stood out before John's eyes. It was the paragraph that was so indelibly stamped upon Hester's brain, and which had caused her such anxiety and burning indignation. It was couched in all the intricate, cumbersome terms known only to the law, and John in his hurry to grasp the meaning nearly lost it altogether as he stumbled over the lumbering phrases, which read,—

"But it is my will, and I so provide, that if, before the expiration of the said period of five years, my said wife, Hester Brent, shall again marry, then, and in such event, my executor hereinafter named, or his successor for the time being, and in default of such successor, then that my said wife herself, shall cause my remains to be removed from their temporary place of interment in Europe to my home, Brent, and there, upon the morning of the day upon which my said wife shall so marry, be interred in the family vault, with full burial service, and that my said wife shall be present at such service; and, further, that for the two days and nights immediately preceding, my said wife shall remain at Brent; and that, failing the strict observance of all and every one of the provisions and conditions aforesaid, all my estate of what kind soever shall devolve upon my heirs at law, as though this, my last will and testament, had not been executed and I had died intestate: save only that in such event my said wife shall be deprived of all and every right or claim to dower and reasonable part, so called, in my estate, and that she shall be wholly deprived and debarred of all right of what kind or extent soever therein."

Mr. Willetts watched John while he read it. He expected an outburst, but there was only a clinching of the hand and a sterner look on the face. When he spoke, he spoke quietly, but with contempt:

"Why, Mr. Willetts, this wretched thing wouldn't hold before any court in the land. Do you mean to tell me that you let that poor woman go through this cruel farce without trying to prevent it? Why didn't you break this will?"

"Because Mrs. Brent would not submit to the publicity of going into court and laying bare the wretchedness of her life with Colonel Brent. I think, myself, that he was a lunatic, and that this will alone would have proved him such in almost any court; but Mrs. Brent was

afraid to make the test: she was morbidly sensitive lest the world should know anything of her married life. There were but two courses open to her: either to submit and carry it out with as much secrecy as possible, or openly go into court and fight it. She chose the former."

"My poor Hester!" was all John could say. Everything was clear to him now. Then he said,—

"The mistake has been in keeping this from me."

Mr. Willetts was quick to reply:

"I don't think so. As a lawyer it was my duty to keep this property where it rightly belonged. If you had known the condition imposed upon her, you would have used your influence to prevent her from submitting to it; you would have felt that she was outraged in having to fulfil it, and very justly. This would have complicated matters very much, and Mrs. Brent would have lost the bulk of the property; she would only have secured her dower right and half of the personal estate, and I doubt if in the long run either of you would have been any happier."

Mr. Willetts then entered upon a history of Hester's life with Colonel Brent. He told John the old story of violence during the slave days, when Colonel Brent had evaded the law through the influence of his family name and had spent most of his life abroad in consequence. Then he sketched vividly the events of the last few days. He told him how he had accompanied Hester to Brent, and how they had stayed two days and nights in the damp, dreary, and, to Hester, terror-haunted old place, where they had had few comforts, during which time Hester had neither slept nor eaten. He told of the wretched experiences of that morning,—of the burial in the family vault, at which a clergyman, an undertaker, Hester, and himself had been present, and how Hester had stood upright all through the short service with her back half turned to the group in the vault, and had never let her eyes once rest upon any of them, but had kept them bent upon the floor; and how the rain and sleet had beaten in through the open door into their very faces and the floor under their feet had stood half an inch in water. He recounted their hurried efforts afterwards to get to the distant station to catch the train which would have brought them to town in time for the appointment at three o'clock, but, as the roads were slippery in some places and heavy with slush in others, they had missed the train and had had to wait an hour. Mrs. Brent had been drenched to the skin, and was nervously wretched, but had made absolutely no complaint, save for the tears that rolled off her face when they had missed their train. When they finally did reach town, they barely had time to get to the church, and—— Mr. Willetts wound up his recital with,—

"You know the rest, Mr. Cecil."

John, with a stab of pain, only too well knew the rest. He had met the woman he loved, who had already endured what he as a man shrank even from hearing, with uncontrolled anger; he had even taunted her,—God forgive him! But there was another feeling slowly surging through his veins; it was savage, brute rage at the thought

of this dead Colonel Brent, who had tortured Hester through all the years of her life with him, and who even after death had contrived to keep it up. John muttered something fierce, and asked, suddenly,—

"Does this event of to-day close Colonel Brent's account with my wife and with this world?"

"It does," emphatically replied Mr. Willetts; and there flashed through the minds of both of them the hope that Colonel Brent was having a heavy account to settle somewhere in the unknown regions of the under-world. Finally, after a pause, Mr. Willetts asked, curiously,—

"How did you manage to learn anything of what took place to-day at Brent, Mr. Cecil?"

John then told of the anonymous letter which had startled him into seeking an explanation from Hester at Chapel House, and how, when he had found her gone, he had come at once to town, and, feeling sure that if there were any truth in the story Mr. Willetts must have accompanied her to Brent, he had boldly assumed that this was the case, and had by stratagem brought out a confirmation of it from Mr. Willetts' own confidential clerk. Mr. Willetts was much troubled at the knowledge that some one had got hold of some part of the truth, and there was some farther talk upon this point; but John was anxious to close the interview and go back to Hester. So the two men parted with a close hand-shake and with mutually expressed thanks.

When John found himself once again in the same drawing-room where he had spent sixty wretched minutes that afternoon, he felt that everything was the same and in the same place, and yet what a different air the apartment wore to him! It was all because Hester was in the adjoining room, with only the portières drawn between them. He could hear the nurse or the doctor moving quietly around, and he hoped that there would soon be a report or a summons from them.

He who the night before, in his misery, had been so immovably quiet, now, in his relief and security, was unable to keep still. He restlessly moved about the room, and managed to rattle various things. This brought a trim-looking nurse to the curtains between the rooms. Seeing John, she stepped towards him, and said,—

"The doctor has gone, sir: he told me to say, when you came in, that he sees nothing alarming in Mrs. Cecil's condition; that, so far as he can judge, she is nervously exhausted, but he thinks she will be all right with rest and care. After you went out, sir, she recovered consciousness, and asked for you, and when told you were not here she became so excited that the doctor was obliged to give her something to quiet her. She has dropped off to sleep. If she wakes again, you may see her; but there must be absolute quiet; there must be nothing to excite her."

John stepped softly past the nurse into the dimly-lighted room. She followed him, and whispered, cautioningly,—

"You must not wake her on any account, sir."

John shook his head in silence and quietly took up a position where he could see her face. It seemed to him that it was the ghost of Hester, the ghost of his love, that lay before him. Her face was white and

exhausted ; her yellow hair had been gathered off her face, evidently in hurried fashion, and lay in a rope over the pillow. Her half-open hands lay nervelessly on the counterpane, and there were traces of suffering in them and in every line of the face. As he noted them, there swept over him a feeling of emotion that threatened to overmaster him. He could feel the swift tide rise from his heart and spread straight to his lips, which quivered beneath it, and to his eyes, which became suddenly dim. He had to shut his hands to keep down the flood-gates. Everything that had been wretched and horrible in the events of the day fell away from him completely. He wondered how anything on earth could ever have mattered to him when balanced against Hester's life and love : it all seemed so little, and pitiful, and mean.

He was so lost in contemplation of her face and in the thoughts and emotions that came crowding to his brain that he did not know how long he had been standing, nor realize how worn out and overwrought he was, until the nurse quietly brought him a chair, and, placing it by the bedside, motioned him to sit down. He gratefully accepted it, and leaned his tired head against the side of the bed, and his long vigil began. Once, later, the nurse came again to him, and said,—

"You look very tired, sir : you had better go to bed. I will call you if she wakes."

But John shook his head. He would not sleep until Hester should open her eyes again and look at him. He could not forget the last terrible expression he had seen in them when she had turned her face to him after the service was over in church.

A little after midnight Hester became very restless, and began to mutter broken, disjointed words. Finally she opened her eyes and looked eagerly around the room, and called John's name in a frightened voice. He instantly bent over her. She was so startled when she saw his eyes looking into hers that John's heart stood still. He thought that she did not know him ; but almost immediately the startled look died out of her face, tears gathered slowly in her eyes, she tried to speak, her lips quivered, and finally she turned her face from him.

"What is it, Hester?" he said, anxiously, though softly. She made an effort to keep back the tears, and said, slowly and brokenly,—

"Why wouldn't you hear my explanation? Why did you give me up?"

It was evident that she had either forgotten or had not sensed the marriage service. Her mind had not gone beyond the scene with John in the vestibule of the church ; everything else had been blotted out. John lifted up her nerveless hands tenderly in his, pressed his lips to them, and said, quietly,—

"I did not give you up ; we were married, Hester ; you are my wife ; that is why I am here beside you."

She turned her face eagerly towards him ; a life came to her eyes. She was about to speak again, but the nurse came to the bed and made a warning gesture, which John understood. He bent his head close to Hester's, and, kissing her softly, said, in a hushed voice,—

"Don't try to talk any more now, Hester; I shall watch beside you all through the night; I shall not leave you for a moment, and I am strong and happy in my love for you."

The look of relief which spread over her face was instantaneous. She asked no further questions; she did not want to talk; John was beside her, he had said that he would not leave her. She dimly understood that he knew everything, and she could rest at last. With a sigh of infinite content, she smiled into his eyes, then her own closed heavily and she sank into a deep sleep. Her slender, nervous fingers clung to his hand and never relaxed their hold all through the silent peaceful night. And John kept his vigil at her side.

When the mail-bag was opened a few days later at Chapel House, there were two letters in John's handwriting. One was for Aunt Jenifer, and one was for Carey. Aunt Jenifer wiped her spectacles, adjusted them carefully, and proceeded to open hers, wondering what John could find to write to her about. Carey carried hers over to the window in order to spell out John's queer handwriting, but her attention was immediately attracted by a big bluebottle fly which had somehow managed to defy the cold weather and was buzzing and humming around with all the cheerfulness and confidence appropriate to a day in June. Carey could not attend to her letter, even though it was from John, till she had despatched this exciting fly. She determined to cut him in two with Aunt Jenifer's shears, and she was just beginning a lively chase up and down the window-panes, when she was astonished to see Aunt Jenifer rise suddenly from her chair, upset her work-basket, and call out in a sharp voice to the entire household, although no one was present but Carey,—

"Carey! Becky! Jasper! all of you! They've gone an' got married in town!"

"Who's gone an' got married in town?" asked Carey, making dabs at the fly with the shears.

"Why, John Cecil's gone an' married Hester, to be sure. Well! well! I never heard the like of it."

"John an' Hester got married?" echoed Carey, dropping the shears and suddenly sitting down on the settle with a thump. "I don't b'lieve it," she exclaimed.

"Yes, here it is: John says, 'Dear Aunt Jenifer,' ('Dear Aunt,' indeed!" she sniffed, though it was clear from the pucker around her lips that John's adoption of her as a relative was highly pleasing to her,) "'I may as well tell you without any flourish that Hester and I were married on Wednesday at St. Paul's Church, and, barring the fact that Hester has had an attack similar to the one when she fainted last winter, and that I have been awfully worried and upset about her, we are the two happiest people I know of. We don't know when we shall return. I hope you will pacify Carey before we come; I shall probably have to give her half of my possessions in order to appease her. Hester sends love, and will write very soon."

"Yours affectionately,

"JOHN WORTHINGTON CECIL."

"It's the meanest, sneakin'est, most low-down thing I ever heard of, to go off and get married all by themselves an' leave us all out, an' then stay in town an' have a good time; 'twould been a heap more fun for 'em to 've had me an' Jasper an' the dog along. I just tell you, Aunt Jenifer, I'm goin' to be real mad about it; I ain't goin' to speak to 'em or notice 'em when they do get back, an' I guess they'll wish they'd behaved better," angrily exclaimed Carey. Then she was silent while she tried to adjust her mind to the new order of things. At last she broke out again:

"I'll just make John fork over lots of things; I'll make him gimme the new beagle puppies, an' his double-bladed jack-knife, an' his best pair of dividers, an' I guess I might as well speak for the yearling bay colt while I'm 'bout it," she wound up, jumping up from the settle and already full of the idea of her new possessions, which, under the circumstances, she knew she could wheedle out of John.

"Well, I know what Caroline Jenifer's goin' to do," said Aunt Jenifer, arranging the contents of her work-basket, taking off her apron, and picking the threads off her gown. There was determination in her tone and a flush on her smooth, pink face. "I'm goin' to march myself to Dorset, an' I'm goin' to tell every man, woman, an' child in that village that John an' Hester are married, an' I'll wager that before night it will be known all over Dorset parish an' the whole county to boot; an' if some of those people yonder don't feel about the size of a pea when I'm done with 'em, then my name ain't Caroline Jenifer." And Aunt Jenifer, with skirts tucked up, and her sturdy feet encased in goloshes, was soon splashing her way over the muddy road to spread the news of John and Hester's marriage.

Her triumph was complete. The villagers stared in one another's faces. There was no truth in the dreadful stories, and there never had been; Colonel Brent was dead, and Hester had been a widow after all, and John Cecil had known all the time what he was about. Everybody agreed that it was the most suitable match that had been made in the county for years; and the whole parish was in an idyllic state of delight over the marriage of John and Hester and their anticipated return to Chapel House, destined to be to them, in a new sense, truly a Chapel of Ease.

THE END.

THE DIAMOND-BACK TERRAPIN.

THE great Chesapeake Bay is an inexhaustible storehouse of gastronomic wealth. Immense numbers of canvas-back ducks and Canada geese find a winter home on its landlocked and placid bosom. The bottom of the bay is a vast oyster-bed, the amplitude of which can be estimated only in square miles, and its contents in millions of bushels. Between the wild duck above and the oyster beneath, there are three inhabitants of these shallow waters which possess peculiarities strongly recommending them to popular favor. They are the shad, the crab, and the diamond-back terrapin. It may be said that the shad are there in millions, the crabs in thousands, and the terrapin in hundreds, for this is the relative proportion in which they are found and caught.

There are three good and sufficient reasons why the terrapin is not so widely known and loved as the wild duck or the oyster. The first of these is his comparative scarcity. The second is the factitious and enormous price at which he is held. The third I once heard succinctly put by an old fisherman, who, with a dignified disregard of metaphorical consistency, remarked, "The terrapin isn't a game bird, and it's a pity."

It must, however, be admitted that the diamond-back is the aristocratic and famous member of the family to which he belongs. His name is known and honored in all the great cafés where men do congregate for gastronomic purposes; and the epicure is especially familiar with that mythological tradition which describes the earth as resting upon the back of an immense terrapin. He regards this as significant of the foundation upon which true philosophy really stands.

The habitat of the diamond-back is the coast of the middle Atlantic States, but especially the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. His neighbor on the south is the yellow-belly, well known in the market of Charleston, and his geographical range is overlapped on the north by that of the red-belly, which, by a pleasing fiction, is sometimes served by restaurateurs in intimate and indistinguishable association with his diamond-back cousin. It is not always well to be certain that you are eating the genuine *Malaclemmys palustris* unless you have personally inspected him before he went into the stew-pan. Indeed, there is a faint possibility that unless you have enjoyed a previous acquaintance with the diamond-back, and are able to identify him on sight, you may become an accessory before the fact of his death and still be able to rise to no greater height than that legally defined as a moral certainty. On such a critical point as this it will not do to depend on information acquired in the library. When it is remembered that the terrapin is a representative of the turtle family, whereof over two hundred varieties have been scientifically described, the differences between which are mostly anatomical and depend on some varieties being in possession of more bones than others, it will readily be seen

that a determination of this kind cannot safely be made upon the basis of any superficial knowledge of natural history. It is quite true that the diamond-back has distinctive markings, and that his very name is to a certain extent descriptive. But, on the other hand, it is equally true that the peculiarities which differentiate the diamond-back from other closely allied species are so minute that the most scientifically exact description would throw but little light upon them. They must be seen and studied to be appreciated.

No successful method of catching terrapin in large numbers has yet been devised. A kind of set net is sometimes used, but with no remarkable success. The general statement holds that terrapin are caught singly. At no season of the year do the fishermen, who make a side issue of terrapin-catching, know exactly where to look for them. All their movements are aimless, and their only habit which can be depended on is that of burying themselves in the mud at the bottom of the water during the continuance of cold weather. In a vague and general way this enables the catcher to locate them. Accordingly, it is during the cold months that terrapin are taken most abundantly. Selecting some part of the bay where the water is shallow and which has a muddy bottom, the catcher, in his boat, moves slowly across and across it, continually thrusting his long pole into the mud. When he chances thus to encounter a hibernating diamond-back he seizes his prey with a pair of oyster-tongs or some similar appliance and lifts him gently into the boat. He rarely finds very many in a day, and he does not need to find many in order to make good wages. On occasions, few and years between, a lucky fisherman will discover some particularly favored spot where the mud is full of terrapin, enjoying their winter sleep. This is almost equal to finding a small gold-mine. In the winter of 1893 a poor negro fisherman chanced upon such a nest of diamond-backs near Tangier Island: he took out twelve hundred dollars' worth in four hours, and then gave up only because he was exhausted.

The fishermen who catch the terrapin sell them to the proprietor of the nearest pound, at a figure considerably less than the prevailing market price. A "pound" is simply an enclosed place where the terrapin are kept until their season arrives. The owners of these pounds buy diamond-backs at all seasons of the year, feed them during those months when they will eat, and about the 15th of December begin to place them with agents in the large cities. A pound terrapin is not considered quite so good as one freshly caught and sent immediately to market. In order to appreciate this inferiority, one must be acquainted with the fact that he is eating pound terrapin. In the absence of this knowledge there are possibly three men in the United States who can, with nothing except the flavor by which to judge, tell the difference between a pound terrapin and one recently caught. On this grave question most people are able to make a guess, in which they have precisely one chance in two of being right. There are some gastronomic reputations which rest upon the fact that their owners have been lucky at this sort of guessing.

Terrapin-farming is an industry that is now attracting considerable

attention along the shores of the Chesapeake. These farms differ from all others except frog farms, in being covered with water, from the surface of which tufts of marsh-grass and sandy knolls here and there arise. These farms, usually one or two acres in extent, are completely enclosed with tight fences, formed by driving boards, eighteen feet long, into the mud to a depth of six or eight feet, or until the hard bottom is reached, thus making it impossible for the terrapin to escape by burrowing beneath the fence. The rise and fall of the tide keep the water in the enclosure constantly renewed.

In accordance with the habit of all species of the turtle tribe, the terrapin, during the months of July and August, deposit their eggs in the sand of the exposed knolls, or of a narrow strip of beach which is included in the farm for this purpose, and leave them to be hatched by the warm rays of the summer sun. The female makes two nests in the course of a season, and lays one dozen eggs in each. If the weather is favorable, the little fellows, three-fourths of an inch long, leave their shells in seven or eight days, and plunge immediately into the water.

During the winter months terrapin-farming is a sinecure, except as the farms are used as pounds and shipping-points. With the appearance of freezing weather the terrapin burrow deep in the soft mud, to lie dormant until the arrival of spring. When the approach of the sun from the south arouses them, they begin to require attention. They awaken from their long sleep with an insatiable appetite, which is not fastidious, but has a decided leaning toward crabs, chopped in pieces and supplied in large quantities. The danger of loss in terrapin-farming lies in the appearance of freezing weather at unseasonable times, when the instinct of the terrapin does not prompt it to seek the security of its muddy burrow.

In warm weather a visit to a terrapin-farm is very interesting. The scene is essentially reptilian in its characteristics. Hundreds of small, snaky heads are thrust out of the water in all directions, and the narrow stretch of beach and the patches of sand which rise above the surface are literally swarming with all classes and conditions of terrapin. You will see at a glance that, aristocrat as he is, the diamond-back is undeniably and unspeakably ugly. From the æsthetic point of view he has not a single redeeming feature. A brief acquaintance will also convince you that he is stupid, selfish, and ill-tempered. He has no accomplishments, and his knowledge is limited to one scrap of information, relating to the time when he may expect to receive his ration of crab. After a few days he comes up to the feeding-place with all the eagerness of a barnyard fowl. But he displays no gratitude and returns no thanks for what he receives; and that ancient story about the little girl who was accustomed to feed the terrapin, and who one day happening to fall into the water was borne up by her pets assembling themselves beneath her and thus carrying her triumphantly to the shore, must be taken with a small grain of salt.

A peculiar sport, called "terrapien-racing," prevails in the vicinity of these farms. The contest is on a par with that described in the story of the jumping frog. The scene of the race is a large room, with an open fire blazing at one side. Each competitor enters one

terrapin, upon whose speed and directness of purpose he stakes his money and hopes. The obstructing furniture being removed, the terrapin are carefully placed in line on the side of the room opposite the fire, and are liberated at the same moment. Animated by an irresistible attraction toward light and warmth, the racers immediately start, in a wild scramble, across the floor toward the fireplace. The interest and uncertainty of the sport depend upon the fact that a terrapin possesses no stability of purpose. Instead of holding his course directly and continuously toward the fire, he is liable at any moment to stop half-way and refuse to move another inch. More harrowing still to the feelings of his backer, he is prone, in racing parlance, to "fly the track:" when he has almost reached the finishing-line of the fender he will suddenly turn off at a right angle and proceed to describe the most eccentric curves. The rule is that the terrapin must not be touched during the progress of the race, but any other means of encouragement is allowable, and each of the backers is accustomed to stimulate the ambition of his particular terrapin by emptying upon him a seemingly inexhaustible vial of promises, imprecations, and oaths, to all of which the reptile is absolutely indifferent. The terrapin whose nose first touches the fender is declared the winner and takes all the stakes. As a nation we are to be congratulated that the scarcity of terrapin will probably forever prevent this interesting sport from attaining the popularity of horse-racing and base-ball. Heads of families, who find it difficult to keep the boys at home on winter evenings, may, however, find terrapin-racing a more attractive amusement and better adapted to the accomplishment of their particular purpose than many which might be named.

Terrapin are commercially divided into three classes, known as "counts," "scanty-backs," and "half-backs." Those seven inches or more in length are counts; between six and seven inches they are scanty-backs, and between five and six inches half-backs. In quotations of prices these classes bear fixed, mathematical relations to each other, based upon the count as a standard. Two half-backs are considered equal to one count, and three scanty-backs are held equivalent to two counts. In buying a dozen terrapin you may consider your order filled if you receive twelve counts, eighteen scanty-backs, or twenty-four half-backs. Regular terrapin-buyers often prefer scanty-backs to counts. There is wisdom in this, for eighteen scanty-backs usually contain more meat than twelve counts, while, supposing the terrapin to be equally well fed and in good condition, there is no difference in flavor which can be distinguished by the most cultivated palate. Unusually large and fat terrapin bring special prices, generally about eighty dollars a dozen. Ordinarily you need not, and ought not to, pay over sixty dollars a dozen for first-rate specimens. You may effect a remarkable saving by buying directly from the owner of a pound or farm. The city dealers who handle terrapin make enormous profits. I have several times seen "counts" quoted at sixty-eight to seventy-two dollars a dozen in New York, while at the same time they were held at only thirty-six dollars at the farms near Crisfield and at the pounds on Chincoteague Island.

On bills of fare one sometimes sees the item "Terrapin croquettes." To a Marylander those words are suggestive of culinary decadence. Through the medium of the housekeeping department, which has become such a prominent feature of literary effort, we periodically receive the amazing information that the Maryland way to cook terrapin is to roast them in the shell and have the meat picked out at the table. It would be interesting to know just where these recipe-makers get their information. It is quite true that the negroes on the Eastern Shore of this State, who before the war were fed largely on terrapin, were and are in the habit of roasting them in the shell. It is equally true that "white folks" would no more dream of cooking terrapin that way than they would think of boiling canvas-back ducks. There is but one way to cook wild ducks, but one way to cook soft crabs, and but one way to cook terrapin. We are, fortunately, in possession of a recipe, obtained from a dame who is a high authority on the subject, which outlines the method known among epicures as the Maryland way. This recipe, with some annotations, is as follows:

Drop the living terrapin into a pot of boiling water. Sentimental people decapitate them before subjecting them to this experience, while those in whom "the quality of mercy" is outweighed by gastronomic considerations ruthlessly consign them to a death analogous to that enjoyed by some of the early martyrs. Separate the shells and remove the meat, retaining everything except the head, outer skin, gall, and sand-bags. Be sure that the small bones are not discarded, for the presence of these bones is the only assurance possessed by some epicures that they are not eating mock terrapin instead of the real article. The meat should then be allowed to cool. Twenty minutes before dinner place it in a porcelain pan and set it on the stove to stew in its own juice. When it has stewed fifteen minutes, add, for each "count," two tablespoonfuls of melted butter, two tablespoonfuls of rich cream, pepper and salt to taste. Gently stirring these ingredients in, allow to stew for five minutes more, and then add two tablespoonfuls of Madeira for each terrapin. Serve immediately, and, the best authorities say, in the same dish in which it is cooked. This is the true way, the Maryland way, and the only way. The resulting product of this method needs no eulogy; it is its own eulogy. There is nothing within the range of gastronomic possibility that will compare with it. Terrapin, thus prepared, is a dish fitted to enrich the blood and fancies of a poet, and to soften the iron heart of a warrior.

David Bruce Fitzgerald.

BEYOND MEMORY.

'TIS not that I forget thee gone from here,—
 All things on earth are speaking still of thee;
 But thou—what sight or sound can bring earth near?
 Soul of my soul, canst thou remember me?

Edith M. Thomas.

QUONG LEE.

"NO Chinamen need apply."

The notice was lettered on the cover of a packing-box, and it fronted the traveller at a sharp turn in the trail. It was a terse expression of the sentiment of the community at the head of the gulch; and in this, as in other respects, Saint's Rest differed from other Colorado mining-camps only in degree. Since the town was on the Pacific slope of the Rockies, the prejudice against the Mongolian was rather more active than in the camps on the other side of Mount Antero, but this was as it should be. To be on the westward slant of the Continental Divide was to be identified in some indefinite way with the interests of the Pacific coast, and California had said that the Chinese must go.

In reality, however, Saint's Rest had little to fear from an incursion of cheap labor. High up on Mount Antero, with its net-work of unproductive "prospects" and "cross-claims" surrounding the "Gray Eagle," the only paying property in the camp, there was nothing to attract the placer-mining Chinaman; and the advent of a laundryman in a community where women were the exception should not have been regarded as an unmixed evil.

It was a woman who finally broke the anti-Chinese traditions of the camp. The Gray Eagle was owned by a California company, and it was deep in the mire of litigation. When it had been found necessary to appoint a resident manager whose loyalty should be unimpeachable, John Berkeley was sent from one of the company's mines in the Sierras; and after the superintendent's house at Saint's Rest had been refurbished and enlarged, Berkeley's daughter came to set it in order.

Kate Berkeley was a product of the mingled influences of an Oakland boarding-school and a Sierra mining-camp. At an age when the daughters of an older civilization are preparing for their first season in society, she was a self-contained young woman of her world,—the world of frontier towns and mining-camps,—with clear-cut ideas of her own capabilities, and a very just appreciation of the homage due to a young person of her attainments who went into voluntary exile for the sake of making a home for her father.

Her coming marked a distinct epoch in the history of Saint's Rest. The chivalry of the mining-camp asks nothing but a tutelary divinity, and Kate Berkeley was well qualified in person and accomplishments to fill the vacancy. Before she had been a week in the camp the benign effect of her presence began to be noticeable in many ways. The loungers in front of Dirk Halliard's and Pete Grim's straightened up and touched their hats when she rode past; Halliard put a screen in the door-way of his saloon, and Grim whitewashed the windows of his gambling-room, so that its interior was no longer visible from the sidewalk. It was also remarked that the popularity of the street-affray waned perceptibly: on one occasion William Johnson, the unterrified

bully of the camp, had actually thrown down his pistol at the sight of Miss Berkeley riding up the street, telling his antagonist to go ahead if he cared to shoot a man in the presence of a lady.

Even Hobart, the assayer at the Gray Eagle, finally fell a victim to the general epidemic of rehabilitation. Miss Berkeley began by making herself very much at home in his dusty workshop, and at first Hobart told himself that if she would come to the laboratory she must take things as she found them. He held out for a fortnight, and ended by putting the place in order, finding his reward in Kate's approval when she appeared at the door the following morning.

"I'm so glad you've had a 'cl'arin'-up time,' Mr. Hobart," she said, seating herself upon an upturned packing-case. "I was going to ask you, yesterday, if I mightn't come over and dust off a place where I could sit down."

Hobart rose and offered her the three-legged stool upon which he had been sitting.

"Thank you, I'm quite comfortable; sit down and go on with your work. I only came over to tell you that Nora has gone."

"Where has she gone?"

"*Quien sabe?*" She pronounced it "kin savvy," but Hobart thought the bad Spanish rather piquant than otherwise. "She told me she 'was not lavin' because she misbeliked the familee, but because the altichude made her *that* faint."

Hobart had ensnared Mrs. Nora McCarthy in Pitkin three days before, and he was a little crestfallen at the swift fulfilment of Kate's prophecy that the woman would go back within a week.

"I'll go down and try again," he said.

"What's the use? you can't get a woman to come up here to stay; if it wasn't the 'altichude' it would be something else."

"But you must have a servant."

"I mean to. I've written Aunt Bassett to hunt me up a good Chinaman, and, when found, to forward him by express or any other way that they'll take him."

"You have? Don't you know that Chinamen are prohibited in Saint's Rest?"

Miss Berkeley made a face expressive of contumacious defiance. "What do you suppose I care for their trumpery regulations? If I want a Chinaman I'll get one."

Hobart knew that Miss Berkeley was quite capable of ignoring the prohibition, and he was equally certain that if trouble came of it he would promptly take sides against the popular prejudice; but he could not help wishing that Kate were a trifle less self-assertive. Three years of life in the unrestrained West had not materially changed the young New-Englander's ideas of the proprieties as applied to young women, and he felt that he would be more comfortable if Miss Berkeley were something less bewitching, or, failing in that, if she would conform a little more nearly to conventional and accepted standards.

"Why don't you say it?" she asked, defiantly, after he had maintained a stubborn silence for five minutes.

"What shall I say?"

"That I ought not to set up my will against the prejudices of the camp. I know that's what you think."

Hobart smiled. "You will do as you please, in any event—as you always do; but I'm afraid there will be trouble."

"I'm going to depend upon you and father to prevent it," she said, airily, with her hand on the door-latch. "I asked Aunt Bassett to telegraph me to Pitkin when my John Chinaman starts from San Francisco, and I'll want you to help me figure out the time, so we'll know when to look for him."

Hobart did this and more. When the time arrived he watched the trail, met the Chinaman, and escorted him through the camp, at no little risk to himself and his charge. And that night, when the vigilance committee met at Halliard's to consider this latest breach of camp-law, he made such an eloquent plea in Miss Berkeley's name that it was unanimously resolved to admit Quong Lee to the rights and privileges of alien citizenship,—which is to say that he was not to be shot on sight if he ventured to show himself in public.

As to the new citizen, he proved to be the very prince of servants; he was so discreet, so deft, so imperturbably polite, and withal so wise, that Hobart, who immediately began to study Quong Lee as a race type, was obliged to reconstruct some of his preconceived theories of racial distinctions. It amused him to find that the Chinaman had a point of view which was entirely his own; that he was quite capable of satirizing, in his quaint pidgin-English, the foibles of American civilization.

"I suppose you'll go back to China some day," said Hobart, one afternoon, when Quong Lee sat on the upturned box in the laboratory, watching the various processes of an assay.

"You-bet," was the laconic reply.

"What will you do there?—cook?"

Quong Lee shook his head. "Buy house an' flarm; plaps buy wife."

"Civilized people don't buy wives."

"Me no savvy slivilized; but s'posee Melican man not buy wife holly ever?"

"I'm afraid we do, sometimes," admitted Hobart, laughing.

"T'ought so. Plaps you likee buy Mliss Blickley some day?"

"You mustn't say such things as that; Miss Berkeley would be very angry if she heard you."

Quong Lee smiled innocently. "She no be velly angly, you leckon so? She savvy me, she savvy you, she savvy evlybody." And then, in deference to scruples which he did not pretend to understand, he changed the subject. "Gl原因 Eagle b'long San Flancisco comp'ny all light, you-bet?"

Hobart explained that the title to the property was still in dispute.

Quong Lee deftly rolled a cigarette and lighted it at the fire in the cupel-furnace. "T'ought so," he said. "Las' night me catchee two man look in shaft-house, look all 'lound, all same likee p'liceman. One man say, 'she dead easy—take um all same likee fall off log; come some night w'en evlybody sleep.' You savvy?"

Hobart understood perfectly. The contestants in the Gray Eagle suit were desperate men, and there had been flying rumors that the mine would be "jumped" and held, pending the legal decision. Under the circumstances, Quong Lee's discovery was of critical importance.

Cautioning the Chinaman not to tell any one else, Hobart sought the superintendent and gave him the facts. Berkeley was new to Colorado, and he was inclined to be incredulous.

"I don't believe it'll amount to anything more than talk," he said; "but you've been here longer than I have, and, if you think it's worth while, we can put the shaft-house in shape for defence and take turns watching it for a few nights. I don't want to tell any of the men, though; if you'll help me, we'll fix it up ourselves to-night."

Hobart assented, and promised to come over after supper.

"Better stay and eat with us: you know we're always glad to have you," said the superintendent; and when Hobart accepted the invitation they went across to the house to sit on the porch till the meal should be ready.

"Quong Lee's nobody's fool," said Berkeley, reverting to the Chinaman's part in the affair. "There's many a white man that wouldn't have had sense enough to spot those fellows last night."

"That's so."

"What is so?" asked Kate, who came out in time to hear the reply.

"That Quong Lee is not a fool," Hobart said.

"I should say not! He's worth three Mrs. McCarthys any day in the week,—you-bet."

The assayer winced. He knew that the expletive was only a repetition of Quong Lee's favorite emphasis, but Kate's use of it jarred upon him. Slang was his pet aversion, and he had always maintained that pure English was the touchstone by which refined womanhood must be judged. The rule had held good hitherto, but now he found himself palliating Miss Berkeley's small defiance of the lesser proprieties and inventing ingenious excuses for her naïve lapses into the expressive idiom of the frontier, and the discovery started a train of reflection in another direction. Was he in love with Kate Berkeley, that he should be so ready to find excuses for her? The question had asked itself more than once, and he felt that it would presently demand an answer in no uncertain terms. All this, however, was the nether thought. What he saw, and what he thought he was thinking about, was the pretty picture Kate made as she sat on the railing of the porch, with her face turned a little toward the flaming western sky.

After supper they all went back to the porch, and Kate brought her guitar and played and sang. Hobart had heard good music, and he was blessed—or banned—with a critical ear, and yet, though Kate made no artistic pretensions, the simple melodies filled him with a quiet joy that had its origin in something deeper than a mere appreciation of the music as music, and he roused himself reluctantly when Berkeley rose to go to the mine.

The fortifying of the shaft-house was a simple matter. There was

enough of the ore in sacks to line the walls breast-high, and when the work was done the superintendent took the first watch, while Hobart rolled himself in a pair of blankets and went to sleep on the floor. It seemed to him that he had but fairly begun to dream comfortably when Berkeley aroused him.

"It's midnight," he said, as Hobart sat up and rubbed his eyes. "I think I'll go over to the house and take my nap; but I'll relieve you at four."

When he was gone, Hobart got up to barricade the door, but the night was so still and beautiful that he went out and sat on a boulder for a few minutes before putting the intention into effect. When he re-entered the shaft-house he heard a noise as of some one running up the steep path toward the mine. Before he could move, he saw Kate Berkeley struggling in the grasp of two men on the door-step, heard a crashing of glass behind him, and went out of consciousness with a confused impression that the roof of the building had fallen in upon him.

When he opened his eyes again, the last conscious thought reasserted itself, and he fancied that one of the roof-timbers was lying across his forehead. With his first movement, however, the light pressure was withdrawn, and a hand sought and found his in the pitchy darkness. He recognized the touch, and asked, "Is that you, Miss Berkeley?"

"Oh, I'm so glad! Yes, it's what there is left of me."

Hobart tried to recollect, and then gave it up in despair. "Tell me about it," he said. "I don't remember anything after I saw you at the door."

"I was afraid you'd never remember any more; they smashed the window behind you, and one of them struck you with his gun, not once, but a dozen times. Oh, it was cruel!"

She did not add that she had broken away from her captors and flung herself between him and his savage assailant, but the pity in her voice was eloquent.

Hobart was still bewildered. "But I don't understand yet," he said. "Where are we now?"

"In the mine. It was this way," she explained. "I was sitting up for father, and when he came in I made him tell me all about it. He had just gone to his room when I heard the men passing the house. Then I tried to get up to the mine to warn you, but two of them caught me just as I got to the door, and the others broke into the shaft-house behind you. After that, everything was in confusion for a few minutes, and then they brought us down here."

"How long have we been here?"

"I don't know; an hour or more, I should think."

Hobart could scarcely credit it. "And I've been unconscious all that time?"

"Y-es; at least, you've been delirious till just now."

"Talking?"

"A part of the time."

"What did I say?"

She did not answer immediately, and Hobart had time to remember that one may say many dreadful things in the frankness of delirium.

"I don't believe you'd like to have me repeat what you said; you know you were not responsible."

"I know I'm a brute!"

She did not contradict him.

"Won't you tell me?" he asked.

"Not now. Does your head ache very much?"

"Yes, but I don't mind that. I believe my arm is broken, though."

"Oh, I hope not! Can't I do anything to help you?"

"Yes; you can tell me what I said when I wasn't responsible."

"No, but I meant about your arm: couldn't I bandage it, or—what was that?"

The noise sounded like a shower of pebbles falling into water, and Hobart asked, "Whereabouts are we in the mine?"

"In the lower cutting, a little way from the shaft."

There was a pool of water at the bottom of the shaft, and the noise was accounted for. "I think they are coming down," he said, quietly. "Please feel around, and see if you can find me a stone or a lump of ore."

"I'll do nothing of the kind."

She knelt beside him and slipped her hand into his, and so they waited for what should follow. Presently they heard a splash and a guttural exclamation, and then cautious footsteps in the gangway. Then a match flared and went out, and Kate exclaimed, "It's Quong Lee!"

"You-bet," came the cheerful answer out of the darkness. "Hol' on; me fix um plenty light plitty quick now."

"How did you get here?" inquired Hobart, while the Chinaman held the flame of a second match under the wick of a candle.

"Me fix um all light—claw! unda flo' all same likee lat—plitty soon fin' ladda an' climb down shaf'. Jumpa-man no catchee Quong Lee."

"What are they doing up there? Does Mr. Berkeley know that the mine has been jumped?"

"You-bet; Mlista Blickley got plenty Slaint's Lest man an' plenty gun, but no can shoot, 'cause jumpa-man say he kill plisona. You savvy?"

"Yes."

"Den me catchee Mlista Blickley an' say me go see. Plaps get plisona 'way, den can shoot plenty time."

Hobart looked inquiringly at Kate. "I'm afraid you couldn't get out the way Quong Lee got in," he said, doubtfully.

"Don't waste any time thinking about that," she said, quickly. "I wouldn't leave you here wounded and helpless if I could ride out in a carriage."

Hobart forgot the agony of the broken arm and tried hard to make his eyes tell her what he felt. "I'd make you go if you could," he

said, "but it's clearly impossible. Go back to Mr. Berkeley, Quong Lee, and tell him what you've found out; he'll know what to do and how to do it. I wish I had a revolver."

"T'ought so," replied Quong Lee, plunging his hand into the folds of his tunic and bringing out the weapon in question.

Kate put the pistol where Hobart could reach it, and when Quong Lee started back on his perilous errand she extinguished the light. "They might see it from above," she said, and then she came and knelt beside him again while they waited for the sounds of the fray.

They came in due time, the muffled echoes of two or three scattering volleys, followed quickly by the welcome rumble of the hoisting-machinery.

"They're lowering the bucket for us," said Hobart, feeling himself slipping away from earthly things as the strain of excitement was removed. "Miss Berkeley—Kate—please tell me what I said when—when I wasn't responsible."

"Perhaps I will—some time," she said, softly.

"No, now—before they come. I'm very ill—perhaps you'll never have another chance."

"You said——" She hesitated.

"Please go on."

"You said you—loved me," the last two words in a tremulous whisper.

He felt a tear plash on his hand and had a confused sense of the precious importance of the moment. "Then—then I wasn't delirious," he said, feebly; "I meant it. I——" He wanted to say more, but the roar of the machinery seemed to drown his thoughts, and the words tripped each other. "You know what I want to say. Kiss me, Kate, if you're not angry."

He clung to consciousness long enough to feel the light touch of her lips on his forehead, and then, for the second time that night, he lost his hold upon things tangible.

For a fortnight after the raid on the Gray Eagle, Kate Berkeley went about under the shadow of a great affliction. Then the clouds broke, and Hobart began to recover. When convalescence turned the quarter-post of appetite, Quong Lee shone as a star of the first magnitude in the culinary firmament. One day, when he glided softly into the sick-room to remove the tray of empty dishes, that model servitor remarked, "You get well plitty soon now, you-bet."

"I hope so," replied Hobart. "I certainly eat enough."

"Dat's good—velly good; make Mliss Blickley laugh likee one time long time 'go, 'fo' jumpa-man come. T'ink you no likee buy Mliss Blickley now?"

Hobart laughed joyously. "There isn't money enough in the world to pay for her, Quong Lee."

"S'posee not hab money, no can buy—bad, velly bad." And the Chinaman vanished under cover of his small sally.

That evening, when Hobart's chair had been moved to the window so that he might see the sunset, Kate came in and sat on a hassock

beside him. When the shadows began to gather in the room, she said, "You remember what you made me tell you that night in the mine?"

"I am not likely to forget it."

"Well, that wasn't all you said. You seemed to think that you were talking to your mother, and—and you were making excuses for me. You said I couldn't help talking slang and horrifying people, and that is the truth. Are you dead sure—I mean *quite* sure—that you won't be ashamed of me?"

For answer he put his arm around her and drew her closer to him. "I told you that night that I was a brute," he said.

Francis Lynde.

THE PLEASURES OF BAD TASTE.

A LADY who has always been known as a person of quiet and refined taste confessed to me once that she had all her life had a passion for bright-colored glass beads.

This fancy had been frowned upon by her mother. She was told, when, as a child, she begged for beads to wear, that none but overseers' daughters (this was in the South) would wear anything of the sort, since beads were ugly and vulgar. This was sufficient to prevent the manifestation of her fancy, but the longing remained.

But are glass beads ugly? The untutored mind everywhere accepts them as beautiful. The tutored mind, one may almost say, has lost the faculty of spontaneous admiration. To say that a thing is ugly is simply equivalent, with many women, to saying that it is "not worn." To the savage, to the untaught in civilization, a beautiful thing is beautiful in itself, not with regard to fitness, fashion, or expensiveness. No searching for data upon which to base an opinion checks the thrill of quick delight in the presence of the admired object. To them a red glass bead is as attractive as a ruby, a tinsel ornament as beautiful as gold.

How often do we civilized ones admire thus sincerely? If Ruskin admires what has been hideous to us, is it not beautiful, and *vice versa*? We pass without an effort from one opinion to another. Perhaps it is that, feeling deep down in our hearts the instinct of the savage for color and glitter, we have repressed our natural tastes, and forced ourselves to see through other people's eyes until we don't know what we do admire. Many a time I have seen a person of so-called cultivated taste hesitate to express unqualified admiration of a gorgeous sunset, a great expanse of beauty and glory, before which the untutored is impelled to fall on his face, and point out as "exquisite" faint eastward patches of pinkish-purple tints which would be unexceptionable in a walking-dress.

How much more pleasure there is in life for those whom we call "people of no taste"!

Even among the higher classes, one occasionally sees some unspoiled child of nature, who knows what she thinks beautiful, and wears it.

It has for a long time been a favorite occupation of mine, when nothing better prevents the wandering of my thoughts, to meditate upon the bonnets of an assemblage. One catches something of the pleasure of the owner in gazing at the frank gorgeousness of those whom our artificial life has left uncorrupted. And the bonnets are beautiful. If one will only see with the eyes that nature gave him, and not through the glasses of prejudice, he must admit their claim.

Bird-of-paradise tails are beautiful objects; so are the glistening green breasts of birds, dangling spangles, tinsel lace, wax beads, and so on.

We who cannot feel admiration are the people of no taste,—we who pause, and consider, and wait for the initiative from Mrs. Grundy. The people of taste, capable of strong, sincere admiration, wear these things out of pure love of the beautiful. I am inclined to think that even the question of personal adornment is secondary.

Is there not something snobbish in our inability to see beauty in a cheap thing? Why should we call a blue glass bead ugly because one may get a gross for a few cents, and a turquoise beautiful because it costs immeasurably more? The bead may be the counterpart of the jewel; still, to the civilized—*i.e.*, the conventional—it is ugly and vulgar.

The frank enjoyment of beauty wherever found, the sincere expression of the primitive æsthetic impulses of our natures, characterize the so-called people of bad taste. For them the universe teems with beautiful things, easily attainable treasures, whose charm remains unchanged through all the fluctuations of whim and fashion.

In strongest contrast to the hesitation, uncertainty, timidity, of those who pretend to taste in dress is the calm enjoyment of her who relies upon her own spontaneous choice. The former has a thousand things to consider, and is utterly distrustful of her natural æsthetic impulses, if there remain any trace of natural impulse after so long suppression. A critical glance from an acquaintance may cause her to abhor the most carefully planned and costly costume.

No such uncertainty mars the pleasure of the wearer of glass and tinsel, of towering plumes and rainbow ribbons. For her standard is her own unhampered sense of beauty. Strangely enough, the free expression of our natural love of gorgeousness is accounted vulgar only among our own people. The Indian may revel in glass beads and brass bracelets, green, yellow, and scarlet garments, fringes and feathers, may smear his face with all the primary colors, and please, instead of shocking, our æsthetic sense. It would be with a distinct feeling of loss that we should view his adoption of the sad hues of civilization. A very mild indulgence, however, in the primary colors, and in the beautiful things which sell for a song, is sufficient to mark our next-door neighbor as a being of a different order, a person whom it is "impossible to know."

Annie Steger Winston.

A WALK IN WINTER.

"SEE them there?" remarked Miles Overfield, as he pointed eastward and skyward, while we were standing by the sole remaining trace of the original forest, an enormous beech.

"See what?" I asked.

"Them dark streaks, lookin' as if somebody had scratched the sky with a sharp stick."

"Yes, I see them. What of it?" I asked.

"You said you were goin' on a tramp to-morrow. If you do, you'll wade through a snow-storm."

And so it proved. Occasionally we do find a man who is weather-wise. The night long, fine feathery flakes fell silently about the house and filled the garden-path. Over the fence the lesser landmarks were blotted out, but the runways of the meadow-mice were ridged and prominent, and an old birds'-nest, now tenanted by the vesper mouse, was as Arctic in appearance as an Esquimau's home. Tufted grasses that had yielded but their greenness to the frost were builded yet a little higher with tapering crystal spires. Crowding as they did the uneven fields and jostling each other in their downward rush, the snow-flakes made no sound. The dry, unyielding leaves bent to the burdens laid upon them, but there was no snapping of the stems. The trees along the headlands were being clothed anew, but as silently as the leaf-buds break their bonds in May. The brown, frost-bitten landscape of yesterday was a thing of the past, when, before the sun rose in the clouded east, I ventured out of doors.

The old man's prediction was already verified, but, not content with the steady storming through a long winter's night, the snow was still making good what Miles Overfield had said. Not only was I to wade through fallen snow, but the air was still murky with the falling flakes. Miles's words had been, "You'll wade through a snow-storm." The smoke was curling from his chimney-top as I passed, and perhaps he was muttering, if he saw me, "I told him so." Miles was a man to make you believe in witchcraft.

It is well that the world is not forever naked. For many a month there had been the bare fields, the leafy and now open woods, the grassy meadows, and the weedy pastures. Now for a change! The ruins of a riotous summer were mantled, and it was as a new world. An uncertain foothold is not conducive to serenity of temper, but the rambler who is disturbed by such small matters should let his more venturesome brother break a path for him. I was not to walk to-day, but to wade. I made no complaint. The rugged oaks, with deeply wrinkled bark and huge outstretching arms, laughed at the storm. It was beneath them that I heard the first sound: a mere creaking of branches, it is true, but it was as if the trees were making merry. A slight swaying of uplifted branches, and the flakes were scattered, and little heaps that had gathered in the tree-tops came tumbling about me.

Then a merry sound indeed began ringing through the woods. Snow-birds and chickadees came trooping by me, and with boundless curiosity stopped and chirped and wondered. The storm had no terrors for them, and never a thought of shelter entered their heads. I clapped my hands, and the hollow sound sent them, not deeper into the forest, but directly overhead. As I followed their flight, I saw why they had sought the open country: the clouds were breaking, and, while I looked, the sunshine broke over the woods, rushed up the old wood-road, and met me half-way under the old oaks. What a superb sight! A flood of sunshine was on the untrodden snow. The wreathed branches of the little cedars, the sinuous growth of green-brier and bitter-sweet, muffled in ermine, and sunshine, merry as a May day, glittering over all.

What of wild life at such a time? Would the birds come back? Would the timid rabbit venture abroad, or the sly weasel dart by me? There ought to be so much life, in days like these; but this is no unhunted country. Shut in by a snow-storm, it seems a wilderness; but the crowing cock is hard by, and the watch-dog's bark reaches its outermost bounds. No mouse, even, may show itself, but the mice are here; no mink may clamber to the snow's surface, but his home is in the hill-side, and I can wait. Here come the birds again, a dozen noisy blue-jays. How well they suit the landscape!

What, is the jay more precious than the lark,
Because his feathers are more beautiful?

This has been asked, and I give the unexpected answer, "Yes, by far." Neither jay nor lark is much by itself; put either in a cage, and you will find this true enough. Their value is in proportion to their being in place, and no languid lay of a lark would chord with the wild wintriness of the wood. The jays blended well with the gray beech-trees, although their bright feathers were as blue as the unclouded sky above them. The tree-tops creaked where branches crossed, giving a harsh sound for other days, but a wholesome one for a day like this; and such, too, was the cry of the jay. The lisping titmice were trivial just now, and belonged to sunny nooks where lingered bits of green and perhaps a dandelion; but how grandly the jay's bold cry rang through the wood! It is not wholly a harsh sound. There is a trace of smoothness now and then, almost a flute-like tone, and the cry, as a whole, I translated "glorious, glorious." It matters nothing how far-fetched are these translations of bird-notes. It is a pleasing whim of all our out-door men, that leads to no misconceptions in scientific ornithology.

As the shadows shortened and the day grew brighter, there were other loud-singing birds that took the places left by the restless jays; and to realize what our winter birds are, one must hear two of them, at least,—the crested tit and the Carolina wren. Both birds are small, both inconspicuously colored, but when I add that of a bright, clear winter morning their cheery whistle may be heard half a mile away, you will understand what these little songsters really are.

They are resident birds, and there is not a day in the whole year when you may not hear them. The weather is never so depressing that the wren has no heart to call to his mate, and even a November sleet will not quiet the tit, albeit he has to take shelter while he sings. Above the songs at sunrise, on a bonny June day, I have heard them, but at no time is their singing so full of meaning as now in midwinter. It can call us out even from before an open fire and tempt us to an outing rather than continue with our back-log studies. In short, no winter day can be gloomy when we have these birds about us.

Yet another delightful feature of a day like this is that of the sudden appearance of birds. Where they were during the storm is a matter of doubt. Some will say, roosting in the cedars, or in hollow trees, or in any sheltered spot. This is plausible, but you seldom find the birds when you go to these places. To-day, while, all unmindful of the cold, I stood listening to the wren and tit, the white-throated sparrows came by, and a huge flock of tree-sparrows, and the chickadees, and nuthatches. Now a dozen or more birds were in sight, and almost in reach. They had had no food for a day at least, yet were not downhearted, judging by their merry twitterings. That great snow-storms are destructive to our larger birds, as the crows, and even to robins and blackbirds, is known, and how it happens that they do not at such times fly beyond the storm's area is not readily explained; but the small seed-eating birds fare pretty well, judging from appearances. There was a lively little kinglet to-day, the only one I saw, that peeped into every uncovered cranny of the bark of an old oak, and once, I know, pulled something out which it swallowed. The tall weeds that now were bent with snow would soon stand upright again, and then the seeds that still were held intact would be found by the busy sparrows. As to the white-throats, or Peabody birds, they always seemed too lazy to eat.

There is a bit of comedy at the conclusion of a snow-storm that had best be witnessed from a safe distance. This is the slipping of the heaps that have been lodging on the branches. They drove me into the open meadow. Snow-flakes are trifles, even when very abundant, but snow-masses have to be seriously considered. A blinding avalanche that carries away your hat and fills your eyes and ears makes others laugh, but you fail to appreciate the fun. I hurried to the open ground, and found a broad ditch that must be crossed. By chance a bared spot showed me where to pass, and it was a piece of great good fortune that I had chosen the path I did. A bubbling spring here had defied all the efforts of frost to hide it, and looking down into the blue-black waters I found a little world as active as ever in mid-summer. Green grasses waved, swaying gently to and fro, as the June breezes bend the growing grain, and a few hardy fishes were astir. From the depths of the pool, disturbed by the long staff I carried, a spotted frog peeped out. Here, then, was variety. Typical winter in every direction, looking off; summer in all its glory, looking down. Many such spring pools are scenes of active life the winter long, but only the hunter and the fisherman know about them. One old man, a turtle-hunter, led me, years ago, to such a pool as this, and pointed out

how even the larger fish often took refuge in them and that here he had sometimes found the largest snappers that he ever caught,—verifying this by capturing that very day as large and fierce a turtle as I have ever seen. It would fill a volume to write fully of a spring-pond in winter. It is one of Nature's hot-houses, that has an unvarying temperature, and so a supply of life that would go far to populate the region did some catastrophe kill all other life.

It looked like a return to glacial times as I gazed at the wide expanse of snow-clad meadow. No ice-bound continent could have been more monotonous—I will not say dreary. The first glance reveals only the general outline, and if this be forbidding we are apt all too quickly to turn away. For the moment I saw nothing but snow, and this I could see anywhere to-day. But what is that dark object by the willow hedge? It moves as erratically as a ghost, and has no fixed shape. I look with shaded eyes and follow it to and fro, to find it is a shadow, and the bird that casts it is betwixt the meadow and the sun. So the meadows, then, had their complement of life. Ah, how little we see, even when fully bent upon seeing! The shadow was of a noble black-hawk; soon it came sailing into view, and not without a purpose did it skirt the broad expanse where the willows grew. Not too near, for that would frighten all the small deer that he sought. There was not a willow-tree in sight but had a mouse's nest at its base, and every mouse would be curious to-day concerning the weather, and would creep from the warm nest in the ground up the tree-trunk, that it might have a sun-bath. Cunning black-hawk! unfortunate meadow-mice! And how the tree-sparrows pitch and tumble out of the way as the huge hawk swoops near by! He is not after them, but this they do not know; and so I miss their merry chatter when the willow hedge is reached, unless indeed they come back, for confidence returns when enemies are out of sight. Sparrows place no sentinels, and so are easily surprised. Evolution has not yet made them what they should be, a little wiser in their day and generation. But the hawk has gone. Far-sighted and quick-witted crows have spied him out, and give him no peace. Their cries accord with the wild outlook of the day, and no one should ask for sweeter music. It is as deep as the baying of the hound which many profess to fancy; and how full of meaning are these battle-cries from far overhead, for the hawk has risen to a great height, but not so high that the crows cannot look down and pounce upon him.

Why is it that there is always a quarrel when crows find a hawk? These birds lead very different lives. There is no real clashing of interests. Are the crows jealous because not quick enough to catch a mouse? I do not find that crows annoy other large birds. In a little wood, filling a sink-hole in an upland field, was a heronry. Five pairs of green herons nested there, and each pair raised their brood. During the early summer, when the young birds were small and helpless, crows continually came and went, but never offered to molest the young, and never chased the old birds. I watched the spot for five months, almost daily, and saw only evidence of good will. Late in August there were more than twenty herons

nightly roosting there; all day long they were continually passing to and fro from the sink-hole to the meadow, and it was seldom that the heron made the trip without meeting a crow. They may have nodded good-naturedly in passing; nothing further ever occurred, I am sure. But in November, when the leaves had fallen and the hawks had come down from the mountains or wherever they had passed the summer, not one of them could rest for a moment in the trees if a crow happened to notice him. Immediately the alarm would be sounded, and a dozen crows, suddenly appearing, would chase the hawk away.

It was but a short distance from the willow hedge to the river bank, but the stranger to-day could scarcely have detected where the dry land ended and the river flowed. It was as uniformly white and snow-clad as the meadows over which I had passed. Yet there was a break. A long, low line, shown by the abrupt change of level of the snow, meant the edge of the frozen river,—frozen now so firmly that horses might safely have crossed. It was here that Nature was most suggestive to-day. Here were both ice and snow, and the apparently level reach of the river was not so very smooth. Uplifted cakes, many feet square, of thick ice made rough travelling for many a rod, and often effectually barred the way. Thoreau remarked after reading Kane's Arctic travels that he had seen much the same phenomena as are there described about Concord. I thought of this while walking on the river. It was no mere frozen surface of a shallow stream, but ice that bridged a valley, and so far more dangerous to loiter over. A wide crack here and there revealed what changes had been wrought, for the channel was almost dry, and, dropping down a weighted line, I found that I was forty feet above the river's bed and quite thirty feet above high tide. The waters had found for themselves a new channel for the time, and the ice held back the tide to a great extent. It was, in short, the Ice Age come again. How glibly we talk of the Glacial period!—how little we know of it! But to-day taught something. The world here had taken a step backward, and showed how it was when man first stood upon the glacial river's banks. There were no walruses nor musk-ox, it is true, nor mastodon browsing on the sweet birch branches; but then in a sunny open spot, scarcely a mile away, there was a seal. To-day the ice had little or no mud or gravel held in its tight embrace, but I found here and there a pebble or slight trace of sand, and this was the key to the problem of whence came all the wide gravelly area, with its huge boulders and its deep deposits of clean, gritty sand. With them are mingled bones of animals, extinct, or found only in the Arctic regions; and man, too, has left unmistakable traces of himself. Even his bones are not wanting in the great gravel deposits laid down in other days, when winter was longer than summer, when there was more storm than sunshine, more snow than rain, when to all appearances we were nearer the North Pole than now.

Be it ever so exciting as we progress, the return journey is painfully commonplace. Retracing my steps, I gladly knocked at Overfield's cottage door, and entered when I heard his gruff "Come." To

him I told my story of the day, and he grunted dissent from every boastful statement. The river was not as he had seen it in his day. No, of course not. No octogenarian admits that the world is ever now as he has known it. Perhaps it is not; but, even if born too late, I had had a pleasant walk.

Charles C. Abbott.

WITH WEYMAN IN OLD FRANCE.

THE wind moans round about the eaves;
 Against the reeking pane
 The rain is dashed; the whirling leaves
 To rest are never fain.
 Within the room the fire's bright beams
 'Midst elfin shadows dance;
 Their mellow gleams shine o'er my dreams
 And o'er the fields of France.

And I with eager eyes see naught
 But autumn wood and field;
 And in my dream the perfume's caught
 That roadside blossoms yield.
 With bated breath through leafy way
 I tread with stealthy glance:
 The sun doth play on rapier gay
 And o'er the fields of France.

I turn the page: the castle looms
 Above me in the night;
 The bell from out a turret booms;
 The steeds are shod for flight.
 And now away at headlong speed—
 For foes ride close, perchance—
 O'er hill and mead, through paths that lead
 Beside the fields of France.

Moan on, O blasts, and do your worst!
 Against the dim blurred pane
 The whirling torrents beat and burst:
 I heed nor wind nor rain,
 But here, the cheerful hearth beside,
 Deep in my brave romance,
 Whate'er betide, I gayly ride
 With Weyman in Old France.

Richard Stillman Powell.

THE FATE OF THE FARMER.

THE American farmer has long held a place greatly above that of the peasant of Continental Europe in his income and style of living, because he has been able to possess a larger tract of land, and greatly above the English tenant-farmer in his independence, because he has been able to own the ground he tilled. He will not continue another half-century to hold this enviable position. The economic forces that have been at work in Europe have also been at work here, but not so long, and therefore they have not yet matured so much fruit. There have been Americans who imagined that our political constitution would protect us from the fate of the Old World. It would be as rational for a man to expect his knowledge of arithmetic to keep him dry in a thunder-storm.

Sometimes we find the American farmer slipping away from his acres, and sometimes we find his acres slipping away from him; as a result of both tendencies there is a separation, widening with the lapse of time, between ownership and cultivation. The American farmer is following the English yeoman into extinction, and the creation of landlord and tenant classes has already made considerable progress here. Specialization is one of the incidents of evolution, and evolution in agriculture is giving us, instead of one class of farmers, who were simultaneously landlord, tenant, and laborer, farmers of the three classes, permanently distinct.

The economic change is already producing political changes. The Populist movement of the present day is the beginning of the dying struggle for political power of a race of farmers who supplied most of the Fathers of the Republic, who were for many years the controlling power within it, but who are now losing their land and with it their political weight.

For a few years our philosophers have been cudgelling their brains for some explanation of the extraordinary radicalism of the class that has long been pre-eminently conservative. They were right in explaining this conservatism by the fact that the farmer had a stake in the country. Being attached to this earth by ownership of his farm, he did not soar among the clouds. Lately he has been losing himself among the clouds, or at least the fog-banks, to an alarming extent. Had the philosophers been logical, they would have been led by the cause of his former conservatism to suspect the cause of his present radicalism, and the suspicion would have been verified by the census. The American farmer is being detached from the earth; he is losing his farm, and is therefore imagining vain things. He is taking up with the most foolish and obviously senseless notions regarding currency and credit and capital and labor and property that were ever harbored by the minds of intelligent human beings. The really dangerous class to-day is not made up of ignorant immigrants, of whom we hear so many things that are not true, but of Americans taught in

our common schools, and descended from the men and women who made New England the world's model of thrift and good sense by locking up in the jail or the asylum the people who talked as their descendants are now talking in Kansas and Nebraska and Colorado. It is in the agricultural regions now that ideas destructive of industry and credit spring up and attain the rank growth of the Russian thistles the Western farmers are begging Congress to suppress for them. The conservatism of the farmer will not survive his transformation from a land-owner into a tenant. Of course it will survive, and probably take on exaggerated forms, among those who graduate into the ranks of the capitalists, but these will presently move away from the rural sections, and their children will be seeking means of killing time in Chicago, New York, and Paris.

The substitution of tenant-farmers for owning-farmers has made considerable progress in New England, but much less than in the West and South, on account of the nature of the soil. Some New England soil will not even support the cultivator, and has been abandoned; other soil will yield enough to support the cultivator if he gets the whole of the produce; it may be cultivated by an owner, but not by a tenant. It is not impossible to sell it, for a man buys a farm not as an investment, but as a situation. Other New England soil will yield not more than the farmer of a past generation deemed a minimum support, but more than an Irishman, a Swede, or a French-Canadian deems necessary: so he will hire it and divide with the land-owner. So we find a tenant-farmer, living on a lower scale, substituted for the owning-farmer of a generation ago, who reared his family in comfort, gave his daughter a piano, and sent his son to college, because all that the farm yielded was his.

Between 1880 and 1890 the number of owning-farmers decreased in every New England State, and the number of tenant-farmers increased. In each of these States there was a marked increase in the percentage of farmers who ploughed the fields of another man, and in the sweat of whose brow somebody in Boston ate cake. In the six States, in the ten years, the owning-farmers diminished 24,117 and the tenant-farmers increased 7246. The percentage of tenant-farmers in Massachusetts, though not large in 1890, was nearly double what it was in 1880; over seventeen per cent. of the farmers in Vermont and Connecticut and twenty-five per cent. of the farmers in Rhode Island were tenants in 1890.

In each of the four Middle States the number of owning-farmers decreased and the number of tenant-farmers increased. In the group the owners decreased 42,304 and the tenants increased 24,075. In New Jersey the tenants increased from nearly a fourth to nearly a third of the whole. In New York the loss of owning-farmers was 26,534, and the gain of tenant-farmers was 12,108. For Pennsylvania these figures were 11,292 and 9222 respectively.

In the South farm-tenancy is largely the result of the emancipation of the slaves. So far as the increase of tenancy is due to the transformation of the colored men from hired hands to tenants, it is a beneficial change. This might be deemed a sufficient explanation of the

increase of tenancy in the South, were there not such an increase of tenancy in the East and the West. Of twelve Southern States six show a decrease in the number of owning-farmers. In the group there was an increase of 13,915 owning-farmers and 275,785 tenant-farmers. In three Southwestern States, Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas, there was a gain of 47,882 owning-farmers and 114,510 tenant-farmers.

Persons who are unwilling to admit the evolution of landlord and tenant classes in this country will seek to explain these facts by the foreigner in New England and the negro in the South, and urge that the increase of tenancy is only local or temporary. But the increase of tenancy is not confined to those sections, nor to the Middle States. Each of the three States of the middle West, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, gives evidence of the same change, and the group lost 31,259 owning-farmers and gained 48,864 tenant-farmers. In Illinois the tenants increased from 31.37 to 36.72 per cent. of the whole. In eight States of the Northwest, in several of which public lands have been obtainable till quite recently, the number of owning-farmers increased 129,322 and the number of tenant-farmers increased 108,507. In Iowa the number of owning-farmers increased 3521, while the number of tenant-farmers increased 16,563. In Kansas the owning-farmers increased 2121 and the tenant-farmers increased 30,463. In the Pacific and Mountain States and the Territories the number of owning-farmers increased 65,512 and the number of tenant-farmers increased 20,350.

In forty-seven States and Territories the number of owning-farmers increased 158,951 and the number of tenant-farmers increased 599,337. In 1880, 25.62 per cent. of the farms were cultivated by tenants; in 1890, 34.13 per cent. of the farm-families hired. The classification of the two censuses is not identical, but there can be no serious discrepancy between the farms that are hired and families that hire.

To study the condition of the Western farmer under average circumstances, Mr. A. F. Bentley, whose essay was published last year by Johns Hopkins University, selected Harrison, Nebraska, as the point of observation. Of four hundred and twenty-nine persons who had at one time or another owned land within the township, two hundred and thirty-nine had never been residents and one hundred and sixteen had ceased to be residents. The land in the township was owned by one hundred and thirty-five persons, of whom seventy-four were then residents, ten had been residents at some time, and fifty-one had never resided there. Even in this remote Western community the absentee landlord was well known. Of the land in this township 12,960 acres were cultivated by owners, and 9360 acres by tenants. Of this latter area 1040 acres were owned by residents of the town, 4520 by residents of the county outside of the town, and 3800 by persons living beyond the limits of the county. Rents in Harrison have increased within a few years from one-third of the produce to two-fifths. The price of land has risen during the last twenty years from four dollars an acre for unimproved to twenty-five dollars an acre with improvements. Yet the profits of the farmer have been going down. "We

may almost infer," says Mr. Bentley, "that in many cases the greater part of the wealth the average farmer of ability now has must be attributed to this rise in value. . . . It may well seem that these statements in regard to the frequent unprofitableness of farming operations are not in harmony with such facts as that the market price of land is at present increasing rapidly and that there is now a more eager demand for good agricultural land than has obtained for a number of years; and again that land is now being eagerly sought by renters, who are willing to pay a larger proportion of the produce for rent than ever before, and who will in some cases even pay a quite high cash rent." But there is no lack of harmony in these statements: a man buys or hires a farm not as an investment, but in order to get a chance to earn a living. What he will pay is not measured by the commercial profit he expects, but by the value he puts on his existence. In Nebraska, as in England, the creation of a landlord class involves the degradation of the cultivator of the soil. Nebraska itself is a landlord on an immense scale, but the rents it collects go to the support of the public schools, and to that extent lighten taxation. The State retains the ownership of the lands granted to it by the Federal government in aid of education until they reach the value of seven dollars an acre, and the practice then is to sell them. These lands are periodically valued, and the rents are six per cent. of the valuation. In 1884, 953,638 acres of these school lands were under lease, and this area had increased in 1890 to 1,497,470 acres.

The process of the creation of landlord and tenant classes may be observed in any Western State. When land could be got for nothing of the government, or for a small price on a railroad grant, every settler could be a land-owner. When land is worth twenty or thirty dollars an acre a considerable proportion of the rural residents must be tenants or laborers. The average price of land sold last year in Jefferson county, Wisconsin, a choice dairy section, was sixty dollars, an increase of nineteen dollars in three years. This is cited as an evidence of prosperity, but it is also evidence that land is growing too expensive for common people to own. A member of Congress from Illinois owns a thousand acres in his home county, which he values at one hundred dollars or more an acre. Of course it is cultivated by tenants, for its owner is a lawyer and politician. The great fortune of the late Justice David Davis, of Illinois, was acquired by the ownership of farm-lands, and hundreds of Illinois farmers are, or were very recently, paying rent to a non-resident Irish landlord.

The Western farmers, who, many years ago, got their land for little or nothing, are now growing old. They are renting their farms to men who will live on less than the full produce of the land rather than not live at all, and they are moving into the large towns and the cities to enjoy life, educate their daughters, and start their sons in business. Even so far west as Minnesota and the Dakotas this is going on; in Illinois and Wisconsin it is a common thing. The tenants, being obliged to divide the produce with the landlord, are in a state of poverty, and they will stay so. As they do not own the land, they will suffer instead of profit as it advances in value. As the population

increases, the value of land will increase and the number of persons who can afford to own land will decrease. There is already started in the Northwest an agricultural peasantry which has no future except one of increasing rent-charges. The sharper the competition for chances to earn a living, the greater rent will the landlord be able to exact. In parts of Europe custom, and in Ireland the courts, limit the demands of the landlord, but in America all rents are rack-rents. The tenant will get a bare subsistence, and all else will go to the descendant of the "homesteader." The agricultural population of this country will in fifty years be poor and illiterate, made up of hired laborers on great estates, of tenants, and of proprietors of small patches of ground which they will cultivate with the spade and of whose produce they will eat only what cannot be sold. The substitution of tenants for owners has already had in parts of the West an injurious effect upon highways and schools; the removal of the most intelligent and prosperous farmers from a neighborhood, together with the substitution of tenants for owners, will make the agricultural population peculiarly the prey of demagogues, cranks, and political adventurers. Such a population will not buy so much manufactured goods as the farming populations we have been accustomed to.

It may be premature to say that there is a concentration of agricultural landholding, but so far as our information goes it points in that direction. For many years down to 1880 the average size of farms was diminishing; in 1890 it showed an increase, pretty generally distributed over the Northern States. The increase is small, only three acres, but the change in direction is notable. The size of farms had diminished from two hundred and three in 1850 to one hundred and thirty-four in 1880. Between the last two censuses the number of farms of less than one hundred acres increased 231,632, while the number from one hundred to five hundred increased 312,711. It is to be regretted that there is no dividing line between one hundred and five hundred acres; the inferior limit is lower than the "three forties" of a public land State, which is a small farm, and the superior limit is higher than three sections, while even two sections is a large farm. The figures would be far more instructive were there a division at, say, three hundred and twenty acres; but without this we find much the greater increase, absolutely and relatively, among the large farms, and this is joined with an increase for the whole country in the average acreage of farms. The farms of more than five hundred acres increased relatively faster than the farms of twenty acres or less, and the absolute increase in farms of from five hundred to one thousand acres was four-fifths as large as that of farms of from ten to twenty acres.

Between 1880 and 1890 the average size of farms increased in the States of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. California is the only State in the Pacific and Mountain group which does not show an increase in the average size of farms. Of what the Census Bureau classifies as the North Central division, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan show de-

creases in farm acreage, and Missouri shows no change; all the other States show an increase.

We shall probably find when all the returns are in that our farms are dividing themselves into two classes,—small farms usually cultivated by tenants, a peasant class, and large farms cultivated under the owner's superintendence by hired men, the farm-laborer class of England. But the man who owns a farm of three or four sections will find town life within his reach, and much more to his taste, and especially to the taste of his wife and children, than life in the country, and this means the three agricultural classes of England,—the owner, who lives in the city or in Europe and enjoys the revenues formerly distributed among a considerable number of owning-farmers, the tenant-farmer, who has increasing difficulty in paying his rent, and the farm laborer, who gets not quite enough food to keep him thoroughly nourished, and who is attached to the soil, not by any law of serfage, but by the iron law of poverty, ignorance, and lack of spirit.

The proportion of our people who live in cities increases from census to census, and in the cities it is unnecessary to say that the overwhelming majority of people are and must be tenants; must be, because the concentration of population has made the land too expensive for people of small means to buy. So that, whether you look at the city or at the country, the Americans are destined in the near future to be a nation of tenants, as the English and Irish are already. That rent absorbs the savings of a community is eagerly and even hotly denied by the orthodox economists generally, though not universally. But as the return secured by capital is steadily going down, as the return made to labor has not increased in proportion to its increased efficiency, and shows symptoms of resuming its downward course, checked less than a century ago by the introduction of machinery, there is no other factor in the industrial triumvirate to whom the increasing wealth, or at least the larger and only constantly increasing part of it, can go, except the landlord. Economists of some repute have attempted to break the force of the logic if not the facts by insisting that the greatest of modern inventions have been in the improvement of transportation, and that such improvements are directly adverse to enhancement in the value of land, and therefore to the absorption of earnings by landlords. There never was a more grotesque example of the disastrous results of seeing only one end of a thing at a time. The learned gentlemen who have discovered that transportation is an adverse influence to rent see only one end of the line of transportation. The most that could be said is that the reduced cost of carrying wheat to England had kept down the rents in England. But even that is not true. The rental value of the agricultural land of England rose \$55,000,000 between 1857 and 1875, during which the greatest advances were made in steam navigation, the American trunk lines were developed, and the Atlantic telegraph became a reality. Perhaps if population in England had remained stationary this advance in rent would have been prevented or would have been much less. But outside of studies and lecture-rooms we are generally dealing with populations that increase. It was the cheapening of transportation to England that gave American farms

rental value; the New York elevated roads created rental values in the northern part of Manhattan Island; it is our great east-and-west railroads that have given a rental value to the farms of Harrison, Nebraska. How was it ever possible for economists who profess to study facts rather than text-books to conclude that improvements in transportation check the increment of rent?

The nearest we have ever come to an industrial Eden was the New England farming town of many years ago, where the population was homogeneous and constituted the real American order of *équites*, among whom every man kept a horse and no man kept a coachman. Yet we have got so far from that now that even a New England poet, no less distinguished a son of Massachusetts than Oliver Wendell Holmes, in his "Teacups," expressed his horror of a state of society in which the dreadful levellers had their way, and one man was not better or better off than another. The last of the great New England bards outlived his recollection of what made his race and his State great. There need be no dread of levellers. The census figures show how fast the soil of the United States is passing into the hands of a comparatively small class, whose members can soon add up the figures of their rent-rolls on the fallen grave-stones of the men who made this country great,—the American farmers who owned their farms.

Fred. Perry Powers.

A PRECEDENT.

"SOMEHOW or other it seems to me as if we oughtn't to do it without speakin' to Mr. and Mis' Dodridge."

"I don't see why, Sister Parker. I'm sure we are old enough to do as we please."

A faint flush mounted to Mrs. Amanda Parker's shapely cheek. A woman does not make friends readily with Father Time, even when he brings her liberty.

"To be sure," she continued, in that dogmatic tone we all find useful when we want to convince ourselves, "the rules don't say nothin' about it; but I suppose the Visitin' Board didn't think about puttin' it in. It's a wonder they didn't. We're enough sight likelier to do it than to throw lighted matches in the waste-basket or to stay out after eleven o'clock."

"Perhaps," said the Reverend Mr. Tetlow, in his gentle, apologetic manner, "the Visiting Board considered it too—too—delicate a matter to mention in the rules and regulations."

"You don't know boards as well as I do," replied Mrs. Parker. "They don't spend much time studyin' to save folks' feelin's. It's my humble opinion that when we show 'em it *can* be done they'll put it in the very next batch of rules they get printed."

As might have been expected, the woman's hypothesis was the nearer right of the two. It had certainly never occurred to the Visiting Board of the "Good Samaritan Home for Aged Ministers, their

Wives and Widows," to include holy matrimony in the list of forbidden things, which was carefully tacked upon every bedroom door. That this was a dangerous oversight might easily have been proved by calling their attention to the marriage statistics of any State, where they would have found that people of sixty—the minimum age of admission to the Home—very often tempt fate a second time at the altar. Moreover, they might have reflected that the Home not only offered superior opportunity for repenting at leisure, but that its facilities for wedding in haste were absolutely unparalleled, since it was located in a small town where licenses were not required, and sheltered under its roof fully twenty superannuated ministers authorized to perform the ceremony.

"Of course it's nobody's business whether we get married or not," pursued Mrs. Parker. "It ain't as if it was anything disgraceful, and it's full as cheap to support us that way as both of us single. We don't expect them to give us a weddin'; I wouldn't ask that of nobody but my own folks. Anyhow, we can have some cake, if we *do* get married in the Home. I 'ain't never cut that cake Mis' Weeks sent me from Philadelphia at Christmas time. I know I can depend on it to be good. There ain't a more particular woman nowhere than Mis' Weeks. She didn't leave grit in her currants, I'll be bound."

Mr. Tetlow, who had been a college man in his day, winced a little at his affianced's double negatives, but consoled himself, as the lovers of illiterate women have in all ages, by a glance at her undeniable advantages of person and scrupulous neatness of attire. Forty years of hard work in a backwoods settlement had not destroyed the almost girlish freshness of her complexion, and there was as much brown as gray in her still abundant hair. What mattered a little freedom with the parts of speech? Few of the Home's guests—especially the women—were punctilious in these matters. They had not spent their lives helping the shepherds of the prosperous flocks, but had served long and faithfully in places where the schoolmaster was even scarcer than the preacher.

"Whom do you think I had better ask to—to—perform the ceremony?" inquired Mr. Tetlow, anxiously.

"I suppose 'most any of them would do," replied the prospective bride. "Did you 'lot on givin' whoever you asked something for doin' it?"

This question seemed too crudely practical to Mr. Tetlow. He coughed delicately behind his handkerchief and hesitated a minute before answering.

"I had certainly intended to offer the usual—a—small fee," he said at last, with decision. "I think it is no more than right, and I am sure it would be expected."

"Well, you want to be sure and get somebody that will keep still about it till it's all over. If I was you I'd have Brother Middleton. He has a pleasant way with him, and I know his wife needs the money. I took notice of her bonnet-strings Sunday, and they were all worn to slits. You want to get a man with a wife. If you're goin' to pay a weddin'-fee I want a woman to have the spendin' of it."

This rather extraordinary tryst had taken place in the soberly pleasant library of the Home. The rooms were all habitable enough, for that matter, and the surroundings less cheerless than in most institutions of its class. The building itself was a fine Colonial mansion—real Colonial, with an apocryphal Washington room and traces of sharply-arrested decay about the crumbling edges of its soft-toned buff bricks. It had been bequeathed for its present use by the last surviving member of the historic family that built it,—an elderly spinster who could not die happy till she had protected her ancestral home from the auctioneer and the possible Philistine purchaser. The house lent itself becomingly to its new use. It had been built with old-time amplitude, and could easily accommodate forty or more guests,—the Visiting Board tactfully refused to let them be called "inmates,"—and the plainness of furnishing, so inevitable in a charitable institution, gave it a pleasing air of appropriate severity instead of suggesting bareness.

The twoscore elderly people gathered there were as happy, probably, as people of that age accustomed to homes with a small *h* could be in a Home with a large one. The bread of charity was not made unnecessarily bitter for them, but the women could often be heard complaining to each other of longings for their own cooking, and the aged ministers occasionally grew weary of each other's conversation, and yearned in secret for more frequent intercourse with the laity.

"It is really pitiful to see them," commented Mrs. Dodridge, the matron, to her husband, the superintendent and nominal head of the institution, in one of the leisurely administrative councils which they usually held at bedtime. "I don't believe the Lord meant all the people under one roof to be of the same kind, or he would not have planned to have families of assorted ages. It's hard enough to live with people all your own age when you are an orphan, or going to school; but it's worse for old people who have raised families in houses of their own. If I had the founding of institutions I'd put in each one some old folks and some foundlings and some middle-aged invalids, so that they could amuse and take care of each other. I'd never sort people out in this unnatural way by ages and expect them to be happy."

It was shortly after breakfast when Mr. Tetlow and his elderly *fiancée* had held their interview in the library. A few minutes before the mid-day dinner he again met her in the hall, and drew her aside into the little-frequented retreat.

"I spoke about that—that little matter to Brother Middleton," said he, apologetically. "He says he can't promise till he knows where we are going to have it, and who is to be there. He's afraid Sister Middleton might not approve."

"I never thought of that," mused Mrs. Parker. "I s'pose the only place is in my room. We couldn't have it down here, for then everybody would know about it, and Mis' Dodridge would say she'd have to mention it to a member of the Board. That's what she always says when we want to do anything. I don't know how you feel about it, but I don't feel no call to ask folks that ain't no kin to me, and young enough to be my own children at that, for permission to get married."

"A very proper—I should say an eminently proper—view to take of the situation," acquiesced her betrothed.

"Now I'll tell you just what it's best to do," continued Mrs. Amanda, who in a long life had met many emergencies and usually made them hers. "Before tea I'll go round and speak to Brother and Sister Middleton and Brother Aiken and Sister Brown and Brother and Sister Simpson, and tell 'em that right after supper I'm goin' to cut my fruit-cake up in my room. That won't make talk, because everybody's been pretty anxious to know when that cake was to be cut, and the ones that get invited won't say anything to the others, for fear there might be hard feelin's about it. Then after they're all in and set down they won't have a chance to tell till it's over, and by that time we won't care how quick they let it out."

The adequacy and simplicity of this plan dazzled Mr. Tetlow, who had been for twenty years a widower and had grown unfamiliar with the more intimate workings of the feminine intellect. "I'll tell Brother Middleton," said he. "He can't find anything in that to object to, surely."

Mrs. Parker devoted the afternoon to her trousseau. She carefully "did up" the real lace collar she had worn at her first wedding forty-three years before, and darned an infinitesimal hole that had appeared in its creamy texture. She decided that it would be better not to wear this down to the evening meal, as such unusual display might excite the comment she wished to avoid. She could slip up-stairs hastily after supper and put the finishing touches to her toilet before the guests arrived. A few tears crept into her eyes as she finished her mending and held the lace critically between herself and the light.

"It looked pretty over that ashes-of-rose merino," said she softly to herself. "I wish I had a new dress now." Woman fashion, her thoughts glided imperceptibly from the simple finery to the man in whose honor it was donned. "Ephraim was a good man," she sighed, "but a little tryin' to live with at times. I wonder if Brother Tetlow is ever tryin'? I s'pose he will be; I guess they 'most of 'em are, but it's better than livin' alone. Old age is lonely enough, even when you have an arm to lean on."

She started for supper at the first stroke on the gong, stopping at various doors along the corridor to deliver her invitations. Slight evidences of her little social enterprise manifested themselves during the meal to the keen eye of Mrs. Dodridge, who could pick out the people involved, by evidences of suppressed excitement.

"Something or other is going on that I ought to know about," she remarked with decision to her husband as they lingered at the table after the others had gone out. "I suppose I might have asked some of them; but you can't treat people of their age like school-children."

"It's probably another new black silk," suggested Mr. Dodridge, with a smile.

"Oh, I hope not," she returned, in real alarm. "If indiscreet old friends and distant cousins knew the consequence of sending occasional black silk dress-patterns to a community where Sunday frocks are usually of cashmere, I am sure that they would exercise their liberality

more judiciously. No one but me will ever know the heart-burnings and gentle envies let loose when Mrs. Simpson's black satin came last spring. Pandora's box could not have caused more trouble."

Up-stairs, meanwhile, the unconscious wedding guests had assembled in the large corner room which Mrs. Amanda Parker occupied alone. There was a minute or two of awkwardness after the door had been shut. The cake, with its fair white frosting, thimble-marked at the edges, stood in plain sight on a small table by the window, but the hostess made no move toward it. Instead she glanced meaningly at Brother Tetlow, who in turn looked helplessly at the Rev. Mr. Middleton.

The latter rose and began a little uncertainly, but gained assurance in a minute and went on. He was a plump little gentleman, jolly and tactful, who had been chosen all his life long for weddings and funerals because "he made things go off so pleasantly."

"We are gathered together——" he began formally, but, recovering his composure, he dropped instantly to an ordinary conversational key: "Sister Amanda Parker has invited us, as we all know, to help her eat the beautiful cake sent her some time ago by a kind friend. What many of us do not know is that I have been asked by Brother Tetlow and Sister Parker to unite them in holy matrimony. Will the bride and groom please stand up?"

He had shrewdly counted on a minute of speechless surprise to save the situation. Before any one found breath he was repeating the solemn but familiar words of the ceremony they had all performed or witnessed so many times. He prolonged it as much as possible, even inserting into his prayer a fervid but inappropriate petition for foreign missions. He knew his little congregation needed as much time as he could give them to recover themselves, and his plan was so far successful that by the time he had pronounced his old friends man and wife the guests were self-possessed enough to offer congratulations in proper form.

"Just to think of my gettin' married on the sly, after all the girls I've advised never to do that if they had to die old maids," said the bride, coquettishly, as she passed the cake. "When we lived at the Landin' and they used to come up the river and down the river and 'cross country, all three, to Mr. Parker to get married, I just sized 'em up, and if I suspected they was a runaway couple I'd get the girl by herself,—usually I'd fix it by askin' her if she didn't want to comb her hair a little,—and then when we was alone up-stairs in the bedroom I'd tell her she ort to go back and get some of her folks to come along with her. You know, lots and lots of 'em went, and I lost a good many fees, because then they'd have weddin's at home and have their own ministers; but I never regretted that. I didn't think then I'd ever be in a sort of runaway match myself."

The bride's composure and the matter-of-course manner of the officiating minister quickly restored the social equilibrium. The ladies praised the fruit-cake and compared their own recipes for making and keeping it, and the gentlemen cracked mild clerical jokes at the expense of the newly-married pair.

"I declare, it does seem good to go to a wedding again," said Sister Middleton, cordially, as they rose to take leave. She had decided not to punish her husband for his withheld confidence, as she had seen a whispered interview with the groom and shrewdly inferred that she was again to know the delight of spending a wedding-fee. "We always had such lots of weddings at our house. It's quite like old times."

As the little group of guests entered the hall, they almost collided with Mrs. Dodridge, who was carrying a bowl of gruel to a sick woman on the top floor.

"Well, I want to know what's been going on in here," she demanded, in her hearty good-natured fashion. "If there's been a party, some one ought to tell me why I was not invited."

There was a minute of awe-struck silence; then Brother Middleton threw himself manfully into the breach.

"Well, Sister Dodridge," he replied, with cheerful composure, "I suppose you are going to hold a trial; and if you are, why, I guess I'm the guilty man. I've just been marrying Brother Tetlow and Sister Parker."

Mrs. Dodridge experienced the sensations familiar to weaker women when they fall into a faint and take refuge in hysterics. Not having time, however, for either of these luxuries, she placed her bowl of gruel carefully in the window-seat and braced herself against the newel-post. "Now tell me all about it," said she, in a judicial but emphatic tone.

The facts placed at her disposal were meagre but convincing. She listened without comment, then took her bowl and went up-stairs rather wearily, as if a new complication had been added to an already difficult existence.

"What did you say to them?" asked Mr. Dodridge at bedtime, when for the first time he had succeeded in getting a coherent account of the evening's event.

"What could I say?" asked his wife, in return. "My official authority hardly covered the case."

"But what will the Board say?" queried Mr. Dodridge, apprehensively.

"Oh, I'll take care of the Board," returned his wife, with confidence. "What I mind is the influence on the others. Now that we've had one wedding you'll find that everybody in the house—I mean, of course, all the single ones—will begin to be looking around."

Alice M. Whitlock.

EDELWEISS.

WHITE in the silence of some heavenward Alp,
Like sacred crystals of a lover's tears,
They seem the ghosts of blossoms which have paled
Pressed between leaves of long-remembered years.

Florence Evelyn Pratt.

CORPUS CHRISTI IN SEVILLE.

NOWHERE else in Europe, unless in Italy, are the ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church celebrated in so gorgeous a manner as in Spain. This is only what might be expected, as, the Catholic being the state religion, and the Spaniards among the most devout of the children of the Church, there is nothing to hinder them from gratifying their love for the sacred and the beautiful in the most impressive manner their imagination can suggest.

Among all the feasts that of Corpus Christi (the body of Christ) may be termed *par excellence* a Spanish festival, since it was in Spain, according to the tradition, that the miracle was performed which proved to an unbeliever, who was scoffing at the doctrine of the Church, that the consecrated host was the true body of our Saviour. There consequently the solemnization of the feast is attended with unusual pomp and display, particularly in Seville, where occurs on Corpus Christi morning the curious and at the same time beautiful ceremony of the dance before the host, which is to be seen nowhere else in the world. Happening to be in Spain about that time, we resolved to pass Corpus Christi in Seville, and had reason to congratulate ourselves that we did so.

From the morning of the preceding day, an air of animation and gayety pervaded the city. Everywhere along the route of the expected procession men were engaged in putting up awnings overhead, as a protection against sun and rain, and in ornamenting the balconies which projected from all the windows above the ground-floor, first covering them with crimson cloth. In the evening a general illumination took place, which in the principal plaza of the city was particularly fine. Along the streets women were selling *buñuelos*, a kind of cakes which they took from a large supply of dough in a pan covered by a cloth and fried in fat on top of a little stove. They were very sociable and smiling, urging all the passers-by to partake of these at the cost of a few coppers. A great crowd, but a very orderly one, surged through the city, particularly wherever the illumination was the most brilliant. There was very little pushing or jostling or rudeness of any kind. All seemed disposed to be good-natured and obliging.

The dawn of Corpus Christi was ushered in by a general pealing of the bells from all the church towers of Seville, that of the Giralda, or campanile of the cathedral, taking the lead. We went early to the chapel which makes a part of the great edifice, and in which the principal services of the day were to be conducted. These could not be carried on within the walls of the cathedral itself, on account of the work of reparation going on there. About six years ago it was partially destroyed by an earthquake. Several of the immense stone pillars were shattered so that they were incapable of acting as a support, and the roof in that portion of the church fell in. The earthquake fortu-

nately occurred about noon, an hour when the Spanish churches are usually closed, so that only three or four persons were killed. Had it been either earlier or later in the day, there would doubtless have been great loss of life.

A portion of the building which was not injured was that containing the chapel of St. Anthony. Here hangs the famous picture by Murillo of St. Anthony kneeling in adoration and stretching out his arms toward the Holy Child, who is descending from heaven to meet his embrace. This is the painting from which the figure of St. Anthony was cut out several years ago by a man who concealed himself in the church and after he had performed this act of vandalism escaped to the United States with his prize. There he was discovered in New York, and the St. Anthony was ultimately restored to the Seville cathedral, where it was so skilfully reinstated in its original position that the mark of the cutting is scarcely visible. There are several Murillos in the church, most of them in the sacristy, but this is much the finest of them all.

The work of repairing the ravages caused by the earthquake has been going on for several years, and is progressing satisfactorily, but the main body of the building is in such a condition that the great services of the church cannot be held there, and the chapel adjoining, called the royal chapel, has been chosen for the purpose.

From an early hour of the morning the blessed sacrament was in an elevated position above the altar, but at a little before nine, the hour at which the mass was to begin, it was taken down and placed in the monstrance, upon the front of the altar.

At nine o'clock the principal functionaries of the city, the governor, magistrates, and heads of police, the captain-general of the army and his adjutants, entered in a body and were given seats in a raised enclosure in front of the sanctuary. Directly after them came in the procession of the clergy, led by the altar-boys and followed by several secular priests, the monsignori, bishops, and finally the Cardinal of Seville, richly attired in his crimson robes. They were all seated in the choir at the opposite end of the chapel from the sanctuary and separated from it by a long passage with a railing at the sides, which the laity were not allowed to enter. The beadle, whose presence is indispensable at all the high functions of the Church, wore a singular dress. He was entirely in black, with a long robe plaited in the waist and reaching to the ground. He wore no hat of any kind, but on his head was a wig of perfectly black hair, smoothed down till it was sleek and shining, and curled under at the ends. His whole appearance was almost as much like that of a woman as of a man, and seemed doubly curious to us in contrast to the gold-laced coat, cocked hat, white stockings, and buckled shoes of the beadles we had seen in the French churches. He carried a mace, but did not pound with it upon the floor, as is the custom of the French beadles.

At a few moments after nine the mass began at a side-altar in the enclosure where all the officers of state were seated. It was a low mass, and was celebrated by one priest alone. Toward the close of the service we noticed the preparations for the dance, the placing of

music on the music-stands for the orchestra, and the entrance of some of the musicians. Just as the mass was over, the rest entered in a body and took their places in the enclosure, while ten boys came out from a side door and ranged themselves in the sanctuary in front of the host. They were beautifully dressed, wearing short white silk trousers, shirred and fastened just below the knees with red rosettes. Their overdresses or tunics were of red and white striped satin, with long floating pieces of the same material hanging from the shoulders. A sash of white satin was passed over the right shoulder and fastened at the left side of the waist. Their stockings were of white silk, and their slippers of white kid with red rosettes. Their hats were made of white felt, trimmed with long white ostrich-feathers and red satin ribbon. It seemed to us one of the most striking circumstances attending the performance that they were allowed to wear their hats when standing and dancing before the host. They arranged themselves in two lines of five each, facing each other, and then as the orchestra, which was composed entirely of stringed instruments, struck up a beautiful air, they began to dance, at the same time singing the tune which the orchestra was playing. We could not hear the words they sang, but they were probably those of some hymn or canticle. The dance was somewhat of the nature of a minuet, but without the bowing. It was a slow, graceful movement, winding in and out, the most striking figure being that, in opposition to the general slowness, every few moments they would whirl around with the greatest rapidity, coming back to the place where they had been standing. At intervals they took off their hats and knelt for an instant before the host.

They executed a number of dances, some with castanets and some without, but they were all characterized by the same slow movement, and they always sang while dancing. They stopped at a little before ten o'clock, when the preparations began for the procession which was to carry the blessed sacrament through the streets of the city. It is said that there have been objections made to this ceremony of the dance on Corpus Christi, and that the people, fearing it might be forbidden by the Pope, sent the boys to Rome to the holy father to let them dance before him, so that he might judge for himself whether it was irreverent or improper. He gave it as his decision, not wishing perhaps to wound their feelings, that until the dresses wore out, the boys might continue. The Sevillians, who are devoted to this ceremony, which has come down to them from time immemorial, take good care that the dresses shall not wear out, and so the dance goes on.

In the great procession all the functionaries who had assisted at the mass took part, many of them carrying lighted candles. The cardinal, the bishops, and the clergy walked near the host, which was borne aloft on an elaborately ornamented tower made of solid silver. A large number of mounted soldiers formed a part of the spectacle. The display of gorgeous vestments and rich metals and precious stones was immense, but the whole affair, though it had a certain magnificence, was less impressive in our view than the simple processions which accompany the feast of Corpus Christi in the United States. The plainer form of the Catholic ritual is better adapted to some natures,

just as many find the silence and absence of display attending the religious services of the Society of Friends, particularly the marriages and funerals, more impressive than any ceremony that could be devised.

Caroline Earle White.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A CAVALRY TROOP.

THE two main things for a troop company are horses, and men who can ride them. The former will most easily be found in rural districts, and the latter in the South and West. Car-horses, such as to some extent, I believe, are used in New York and Richmond, are undesirable. There is a certain *je ne sais quoi* about car-horses, as about ready-made ties, which must lead a self-respecting cavalry company to avoid using them.

I saw a cavalry troop, once, mounted on car-horses, and the men had that strained and anxious look which "Black Beauty" books tell us is characteristic of suffering dumb animals,—such a look as they might have worn if they had expected the car conductor around shortly for the fares and had left all their change in their civilian trousers at home. They also found so much difficulty in starting and stopping together that an old farmer, sitting sideways on a ragged gray mare and watching them with the eyes of a horseman, suggested that instead of shouting out his orders the captain should ring a bell,—twice to go ahead, and once to stop. The idea is really worth considering for such companies as are led by circumstances, or by a depraved natural taste, to adopt car-horses instead of more noble steeds.

While I am on this phase of the subject I will mention that plough-horses—in literature treated rather condescendingly—make the best kind of chargers, in many respects. They are not unduly excitable, and their heads droop conveniently for the sabre exercises. At our mustering-in, I slashed through the ears of my sister's horse (which is not a plough-horse), and was saved from the mortification of finishing the drill on an earless steed only by that wise provision of the War Department which makes sabres dull except at the point. There was no provision, however, for tempering the surprise and grief of my sister's horse and the resulting difficulty of staying in the saddle.

A nervous horse, even if one escape his ears, becomes very much wrought up during some of the manœuvres,—particularly during that one where the two platoons gallop at each other and clash their sabres together. He may get so wrought up that you can't control him with your left hand, and are obliged, in using your right hand, to let your sabre point towards the left at an unseemly angle. Under the exigencies of the occasion your sword may then penetrate your left-hand neighbor to a greater or less depth. For this reason I consider an amiable and peaceable left-hand neighbor the best substitute for a plough-horse that I know of. It is not every man that will accept a four-inch cut in his uniform and a three-inch cut in himself with Christian resignation.

But to return to those general principles which ought to govern the formation of a cavalry troop,—principles which I am afraid that I am neglecting for interesting but less important details. An ex-Confederate cavalryman is most useful. He gives tone and standing to the whole affair; he can be elected captain, can make the speeches, and can even drill you after a reminiscent fashion until the tactics come. To be sure, you have then to unlearn a good part of what he has taught you; but you will be surprised to see how little you have assimilated.

Perhaps before going any further I ought to acknowledge that my life has not been spent in organizing companies of cavalry; that, to tell the truth, I have helped to organize but one, and that one only in the capacity of private. But on the other hand the gentle reader must remember that that one was in *the county of the State of the Union* whose salubrious and other advantages cannot even be imagined by any one unacquainted with the prospectuses of our land-agents. Moreover, our company was pronounced, by no less a person than Colonel Jo—— But I must not boast.

We began drilling in winter. This I cannot recommend. There is a great deal of explaining the first month; and in a large open field on the top of a wind-swept hill one can get very cold while one's captain is trying to remember what the orders for certain movements were during the war. Then, too, you may be so stupid at first that the captain will think it necessary to drill you on foot. That isn't bad for those that drill, but the number fours, who hold the horses, have a very, very cold time. There is only one thing which compares with it, and that is dress-parading on the Fourth of July, with one's finery topped off by the diabolical helmet with which the United States thinks proper to subdue the military ardor of her National Guard. The metal end of the plume which goes down inside the helmet was, with one of our men, so long that it rested on the top of his skull. He was one of those men whom I have recommended as a good left-hand neighbor, and made only a few mild complaints, now and then, when the iron, or rather the brass, entered a little deeper than usual into his soul. It was on this day that the assistant inspector-general pronounced us the best drilled company he had ever mustered in; therefore I presume that the agony of the headaches we suffered did not detract from our martial appearance.

Before we arrived at this state, when we knew the difference between "Left front into line" and "Right forward, fours right," we underwent much. Our officers in particular labored long over the little yellow-leather-covered book which contains that multitude of commands between which there is to the new militiaman such a bewildering family resemblance. The captain would give some command, and we would execute some manœuvre; and then the captain would yell to the guidon, "Say, Lee, was that right?" or the lieutenant would yell to the captain, "That ain't it!" and then they would fish out their little yellow books and verify things.

There was the proper command for everything. When we were going along one side of the road, in twos or fours, and it occurred to the captain that we should look better on the other side, he would com-

mand, "Right oblique, march!" and we would all cross over. It was a pretty movement, when the rear platoon did not sag too far behind the front one, and we took considerable delight in executing it. But when we met a wagon or a drove of cows, the chiefs of platoons too often forgot the pretty movement, and, waving their swords excitedly, shouted, "Come over this side, you fellows," which I am bound to say worked equally well.

One more word about horses. I think that out of respect to the spectators, of whom even in inclement weather a few are sure to show their patriotism by appearing, a rule ought to be made that not more than a certain proportion of the men—say one-quarter—should ride unbroken colts to drill.

No one understands better than I the temptation to bring a three-year-old filly to drill, where among many well-behaved and older horses she may learn how much too much *ego* there is in her *kosmos*. But then on the other hand I also know the fearful nervous strain of riding four feet behind a kicking colt. Four feet is such a very short distance under some circumstances.

If a rule like this is not considered feasible, the next best thing is to choose for your first sergeant a man of the kind to see whom manage an unmanageable horse is a liberal education. He can then, in extreme cases, swap horses with the colt-riding private and remove the danger from the ranks. In that case, though, your attention for the rest of the drill will be divided between the orders of your captain to keep your eyes to the front, and Sergeant Walker's domination of the spirit of independence and of bucking in the colt.

When your company has been in existence a year or so, you will begin to wonder, as many have wondered before, what it is good for, anyhow,—like mosquitoes. On the day when we first wore our uniforms, our captain said to us, after the drill, "We will now parade through the streets of Charlottesville to show its citizens what they have to rely on in times of danger." Had I only known it, this apologetic order to parade was the key to the *raison d'être* of all cavalry troops.

The second time we paraded, he gave the same excuse in a little feebler form; and after that we paraded with no excuse at all. Not "I think, therefore I am," but "We parade, therefore we are," is what proves a cavalry company a reality.

The parade is not only the ultimate reason for a cavalry troop, but is also the severest test of the efficiency of the said troop. Parading—including all kinds, political, funereal, social, commemorative, celebrative, and others—has all the dangers of cross-country riding and of celebrating the Fourth of July on Boston Common, most of those of war, those of a Wagnerian concert, and many others peculiar to that condition of society when a number of mediocrities give vent to their delight and thanksgiving at having elected another mediocrity to sit above them in a high place. It is always inspiring to elect a Senator, especially if you have never heard of him before and thus can hope that he will be more intelligent than the average.

If your troop, at one of these times, can stand, at night, drawn

up along the road, while the rest of the procession passes; can stand the swinging torches of the awfully dressed and masked paraders; can stand the blaring patriotic band; can stand the fire-works department, shooting fire-crackers and Roman candles in front of its nose, not only skyward, but, with malice, "into its very midst;" can stand the cannon which waits till not ten feet away before going off, the blue and red Bengal lights suddenly flaring to right and to left; can stand all the other ways in which a simple bucolic people expresses its pride and joy at the saving of the country,—if, I say, your troop can stand all this without hopelessly breaking ranks, without unseating any of its horse-men, without crushing any of the terror-driven, fence-climbing spectators,—if, let me repeat, your troop can do and not do all these things, then you may begin to hope that you have arrived at that stage of perfection when the government will send you the fatigue uniforms it promised you a year or so ago.

These things that I have related happen in the beginning. Afterwards—but that is another story.

Kenneth Brown.

MY DISCONTENT.

I COULD content myself to be one drop
 Among the myriad drops that swell the breast
 Of life's full sea, if I might ride the crest
 Of some proud wave that none can overtop;

If I might catch the sun's sweet morning light,
 When swift he mounts into the day's cool space,
 And paint his tinted clouds upon my face,
 And wear the stars upon my breast at night.

But, oh, to lie a hundred fathoms deep,
 Down in a cold, dim cavern of the sea,
 Where no sun-ray can ever come to me,
 Where shadows dwell and sightless creatures creep;

To gaze forever up, with straining eyes,
 To where God's day illumines the shining sands,
 To grope, and strive, and reach with pallid hands,
 Yet never see the light, and never rise!

I should go mad, but for a still, small voice,
 A pitying voice, that sometimes says to me,
 "It takes so many drops to fill life's sea,
 Ye cannot all have places of your choice."

Carrie Blake Morgan.

AN IDYL OF THE FORTIES.

THE packet-boat gliding smoothly through the still waters of the Erie Canal at the rate of six or seven miles an hour, its passengers seated on the deck in good weather, some talking, some knitting, some near the stern smoking Havana cigars (in those days genuine and obtainable everywhere at five cents apiece), and all interested in the trotting of the three well-drilled horses who drew the boat, has no existence at present, and even among the inhabitants of the Mohawk Valley and the Montezuma Levels hardly survives as a tradition. When railway locomotion came in, canal locomotion went out, except as to grain and potatoes. But there were charms in the leisurely water travel of those days which are denied to the fierce rattlings of the upholstered oblong boxes that now over the resounding Bessemer steel follow the flight of the shrieking engine.

The horizon of one's travel is to-day immeasurably extended beyond the limits of that far-off yesterday, and yet it seems no wider to the eye. If Denver or Salt Lake City is now three days from Albany, so was Buffalo half a century ago. The journey to Colorado or Utah is noisy and tiresome. The trip from Buffalo to Albany was quiet and restful. You saw perhaps one-eighth as much territory, but you saw it eight times as thoroughly. You were a part of the lovely long-drawn-out sunrises and twilights of the summer, of the waving wheat-fields, the rich meadows, the lush and dewy pastures, the well-cultivated domains of corn and potatoes, that gladdened the eyes all through the fertilities of Central New York. Sitting on the deck at night you were neighbored overhead by the lustrous Lyra, and by the immense brilliancies of the Swan circling up and over out of the northeastern skies, while the handle of the never-setting Dipper pointed to Arcturus bending his course to the west. Above, there was nothing between you and the Infinite; all around you were the ineffable dewy flavors of a summer night in the fields, the hushed murmurs of nature which never wholly sleep; and underneath you was the soft swish of the water, while at the stern the voice of the watchful steersman now and then broke the stillness with the warning cry, "Low bridge," in obedience to which you bent down your head until you cleared the overhanging structure.

All this is now as remote and impossible as it would be to find Lycidas and Simichidas sitting opposite each other in a shady nook of Sicily, celebrating the festival of Demeter, the goddess of harvests, and contesting with each other for the prize of pastoral lyrics. Do you suppose that you could go up into the hills from Palermo, or Messina, or Catania, and find such a jolly party as the "Thalysia" depicts?—"Around whom sitting on the grass, tufted larks and goldfinches were singing, the turtle-dove was cooing, tawny bees were humming about the fountains; all things were exhaling the incense of very plenteous summer and of fruit time. Pears lay honey-sweet and musky at our

feet ; and by our sides apples were rolling in abundance ; and boughs weighed down to the ground with damsons shaded us. And then too from the mouths of the wine-flasks we knocked off the four years' wax."

No. If you found any grapes, apples, or oranges, they would be behind sufficient enclosures ; the proprietor would demand to be paid in current coin of the realm, and by some occult telegraphy he would contrive to set a gang of brigands on your track before you were fairly out of sight.

But on the 15th day of September, 184-, none of these things disturbed the minds of the party that sat amidships on the deck of the Red Rover. There were other groups, with which we are not concerned ; the unwritten laws of courtesy require us, as they required this particular party of people, not to notice the words or actions of their neighbors.

Our group was made up as follows. In the two easiest chairs were Miss Celestine Butler, of Buffalo, and her aunt and chaperon, the accomplished Letitia Butler, somewhat well known at that time as the author of certain stanzas that had appeared in *Graham's Magazine* over the signature of "The Joyful Cupbearer." Those were days when versifiers were not as unprofitably numerous as at present, and when merit even of the modest second grade was tolerably sure of recognition. The accomplished Letitia, strong in the faith of her own literary abilities, was also filled with an abiding assurance of her prowess as a guardian of young-ladyhood against the wiles of men, whether old or young. "There is a popular belief," said Letitia, "that the old fellows are the worst ; but I say, look out for all of them. As the poet Thomson sings, 'Trust not your soft moments with betraying man.'"

Seated near the young lady and her guardian were two young men not of full legal age, and yet as self-possessed and reliant of the future as though their infancy were immeasurably far behind them. John Vandergrift and Edgar Russell were on their way to Yale, in which their senior year was to begin on the 28th ; and if there is any individual on the footstool who is more cock-sure of his importance to the universe than a Yale senior, the world has yet to become acquainted with him.

The ladies went on board at Buffalo, and the seniors at Rochester. Neither pair had ever heard of the other before the Red Rover reached Rochester. But before the packet went through the first lock on the eastern outskirts of the Flour City, a lively conversation had sprung up between them, and it happened in this way.

Celestine was a beautiful vision to the young men, as they came aboard. Her eyes beamed with delight at the spectacle of the Genesee, swollen with the early September rains, foaming and swirling down to the falls under the Canal aqueduct, in those days a memorable triumph of engineering skill. Animated beauty is loveliness at its best, and said Vandergrift to Russell,—

"It is two days to Albany. We must become acquainted with those ladies."

"But how?"

"There is always a way. 'Aut inveniam viam aut faciam,' said Cæsar, with a noble lavishness of auts and ams. First, I'll consult the boat's passenger-list; then, knowing their names, you will introduce me to the old lady, she will present me to the young one, and then I'll make you acquainted with both."

"Well, I'll be——"

"No, you won't. Nothing of the sort. These ladies appear to be travelling alone. Neither of them is company for the other, and they are probably bored to death. How the younger one's eyes lighted up when she saw the rapids of our river! Well, what are rapids to a couple of nice young men, as it is the fashion to style us? And suppose we are discomfited, which isn't likely; they won't hurt us. Our attempt will flatter them, at all events. I tell you, Russ, being six months older than you, that no woman was ever yet offended by the admiration of our sex. Umbrage is taken by these charming creatures only when modes of expression are faulty."

Having thus philosophized, Vandergrift went into the captain's office and consulted the passenger-list. And as he did so, he recollected that his father had once made mention of a certain Butler who had in the early years of the century emigrated from Hartford to the Western wilds in company with a Russell, a grandfather of Edgar, and who had refused to stop at the swamp which afterwards became Rochester, but pressed on through the woods to the shore of Lake Erie.

The result of this was that just before the Red Rover reached the first lock, Russell, having taken a lesson in the cabin from Vandergrift, bowed very low to Miss Letitia and her charge on the deck, and after recalling himself to her notice as his grandfather's grandson, and therefore on a sentimentally friendly footing with the Butlers of Buffalo, begged leave to present his companion and classmate, Jack Vandergrift, or rather J. Ward Vandergrift, of Rochester. His mother was a Ward, you know, and Jack was very proud of his middle name.

Miss Letitia smiled, and drew herself up with a certain self-consciousness not wholly explainable even to herself. The day of the omnipresent and utterly unabashed drummer had not yet arrived, and travellers were wont to be sociable on the long and leisurely journeys of the period, without a too rigid observance of the rules of etiquette. The young man had an ingenuous and intelligent face, and Miss Letitia felt that she was disposed to like him. And yet she was in charge of a valuable animated package, and she hesitated.

"The woman who hesitates"—even children know what becomes of her. Russell was equal to the occasion. He drew a folded paper from his breast-pocket and handed it to the lady. "Oh, I assure you, Miss Butler, we are precisely what we say we are. This is our Junior Exhibition programme of last April at Yale, you know. Vandergrift was high up. You see his name there among the Philosophicals,—see, John Ward Vandergrift, on the 'Decadence of Public Virtue'; and there's mine lower down. I'm only a First Dispute; that's

because I was weak in my mathematics and went all to pieces on Conic Sections. Whole families have been ruined by *them*."

"I don't exactly know what comic sections are," answered the lady; "but it is probably very easy to go to pieces on sections of any kind. You have my sympathies."

"Thank you very much," said the senior, bowing.

"You and your friend are from Rochester?" continued the lady. "Do your families visit the Wards, the Goulds, and the Livingstons?"

"Oh, decidedly. Why, Vandergrift's mother was a Ward; and as for the others, we're as thick as—excuse me, we are on terms of close intimacy. You know we are all First Church people, except the Livingstons; they stand by the Brick Church, first, last, and all the time. The Wards live on Sophia Street, while the Goulds, you know, are quite well out towards Brighton, on east Main Street."

Miss Letitia smiled. "I don't think there is much doubt about you. Yes, you may introduce your friend. But you mustn't talk shop to us, you know. Nor college jokes: you see, we know them all,—the cow in the belfry, the shopkeepers' signs taken down at Christmas, the goose tied in the professor's chair and the professor saying to the class, 'Since you have selected one of your own number as a teacher, I will retire.' Oh, dear me, how tired we all are of these stupid things! I don't think they would even interest my niece, who is just out of school."

"Thank you very much. And although *we* are supposed to have absorbed all the wisdom of the Ancients and Moderns, we will faithfully agree not to flaunt it vaingloriously, nor rehash old jokes, but in all respects to make ourselves as agreeable and useful as possible." And with these words Russell departed.

Celestine had been sitting quite near, and caught nearly all this conversation. She was secretly pleased at the thought of having two young travelling companions of the male sex, but, with feminine duplicity, she said, "Oh, aunty, how could you encourage that bold young man who presumes to introduce himself and then another person on the strength of his own acquaintance? Really, it's almost shocking."

"Be quiet, child," replied her aunt. "You must be polite to them, so long as I tolerate them."

By this time Russell had brought up Vandergrift and presented him to Miss Letitia, who thereupon presented both to her niece, and the party were soon chatting sociably, sitting on camp-chairs on the front deck, while smoothly gliding among the rich fields and orchards of Monroe and Wayne Counties, the peach-trees bending with orange-colored malacatoons, and the apple-trees showing deep masses of yellowing pippins and crimson Northern Spies in their first autumn glory.

There was no dearth of topics for conversation. Those were the days when Dickens was amusing the world with "Pickwick Papers" and "Nicholas Nickleby" on the instalment plan, and people were beginning to talk about Thackeray. Walter Scott was also in full

vogue, and had not yet been voted "tiresome." There were fewer new books, but they were discussed more thoroughly. One felt safer in general society when there were so few competing writers, and with ordinary industry one could keep up with the procession; whereas now, "ere one can say behold, the jaws of darkness have devoured" the Robert Elsmere of yesterday, and you are questioned about the Heavenly Twins of to-day, and supposed to know all about the book that Crawford is expected to emit to-morrow. Under such strains the brain reels, and one is disposed to excuse the Sultan Omar for burning the Alexandrian Library.

On the afternoon of the second day, as the Red Rover smoothly swept through the still green meadows of the Mohawk under the frowning cliff of St. Anthony's Nose, at Fort Plain, Vandergrift, who had done little else during the voyage than gaze at Celestine from all points of view, profile, quarter, half-quarter, what not, suddenly said to himself, "I love her. She must be mine. This is indeed Love. She is my Fate." And many other words to the same effect, which were confided to the safe-keeping of himself alone.

And now how to open up lines of communication with the young lady herself? It is quite out of the beaten track of the conventionalities to propose to a young lady on an acquaintance of less than thirty-six hours, and the young man sadly recognized this. He also felt that his position would not be improved materially on the night boat from Albany to New York, and that in the early morning, in the confusion of disembarking at the dock and separating to go in different directions in hired cabs, there would be but slender opportunities for sentimental approaches to a maiden heart.

Such were the surmises of the young man; and they proved to be correct. After slowly bumping down to Albany through an apparently endless series of locks, the quartet barely escaped missing the night boat, and once on board, after a hasty supper, aunt and niece retired to their state-room, while Vandergrift and Russell paced the deck disconsolately in the moonlight, and, confiding in each other, compared notes as to their feelings. Vandergrift was delighted to find that Russell was heart-whole.

Next morning when Vandergrift helped the ladies into a carriage, pressing Celestine's hand as emphatically as he dared, he said, hurriedly, "May I write to you at Buffalo?" and Celestine answered, "Perhaps." This "perhaps" was enough, and the senior fared joyfully on to New Haven.

A month passed, and Vandergrift one evening laid aside Kent's Commentaries, and wrote a letter to Celestine which upon a re-reading seemed to him to be a triumph of epistolary art. And it was really an admirable letter, not too warm, not too witty, not too sentimental, but just sentimental, witty, and warm enough. Celestine answered it in fewer words and in a more constrained style. She said that her parents made no objections within bounds, and that Aunt Letitia read both sides. And still Vandergrift kept on, and the correspondence was a very fair literary study, elegant, and not in any respect compromising.

But it ceased on the Buffalo end of the line in the early summer, nor could the tentative letters of the young man effect its renewal. There was no ground for complaint, or for reiterated requests, or for any reproaches at all. But Vandergrift went about under a sense of injury and loss, and could hardly muster up courage to write and rehearse his Commencement oration, which was a remarkably good one, and, being a High Philosophical, was warmly appreciated by a contingent of female admirers and male enthusiasts of the undergraduate classes. And on the day after the Commencement he set out for Buffalo. "This suspense," he said to himself, "is killing me."

Arrived at Buffalo, he brushed away the dust of travel at his hotel, put on a smart before-dinner suit, and set out for Mr. Butler's house on — Street. It was readily found,—an octagon brick and ashlar mansion, set in a charming lawn remote from the street, and having the ineffable charm that good taste lends to wealth. Something appeared to be going on: the windows were open, there was music from a room in the rear, young women in white passed and repassed in the parlors, mingled with men in dark coats and gray trousers. Carriages drove up, were relieved of their occupants, and drove away. It occurred to Vandergrift that he had chanced upon a garden-party in its first stages; but he hoped not to be unwelcome.

As he reached the door it happened that he met Miss Letitia on the very threshold, attired in an attractive taffeta silk, tailor-made, in the height of the mode. She put out both hands. "Oh, Mr. Vandergrift, I'm so glad you've come. We mailed you cards last Monday. Did you get them? But, anyhow, you're just in time for the ceremony. Come right in."

"Ceremony!" gasped the graduate, leaning half helplessly against the door-post. "Ceremony!"

"Why, yes. Oh, you didn't know, of course. Yes, Celestine is going to be married to Mr. Josiah Hamilton, great grain and lumber firm of Hamilton, Briggs & Sawdoff. Oh, it's a beautiful thing for my niece. Such an establishment, and the groom isn't so awfully old; why, I don't call fifty old in a man. You can see him now, talking with her papa,—see, between the parlors. Why, if he wasn't bald, he could almost pass for thirty. And so rich, and so good-natured. Oh, Celestine will be very happy; at least she ought to be."

Vandergrift turned very pale, a sort of sickness seized him, his hand trembled as he gave it to the lady to say good-by. She was quick to notice the symptoms, and exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Vandergrift, I'm so sorry. I begin to see. Oh, dear, dear! But really, you know, *you* are so young,—twenty or twenty-one. My dear boy, wait till you are just this side of forty, with your name and fortune made: you'll be still young then, and you shall marry her daughter."

And he did. He told me this story himself; and he moralizes to this conclusion, that it is always best to wait for the daughter if you are in love with the mother and can spare the requisite time for the fulfilment of the plan. Especially if you are compelled by circumstances.

Champion Bissell.

LINGO IN LITERATURE.

THE flood of negro-talk that has discolored our recent literature is not a dialect. It consists chiefly of the vulgarity, the mispronunciation and misuse of words that come of a lack of education and polite association. Hardly any of it is even provincialism, and still less is the survival of old forms and usages. Nor is it due in any appreciable degree to locality. In fact, it arises from condition almost wholly, and is really the mere lingo of our lowest classes, with small distinction on account of race and color. It is kitchen-talk, as distinguished from that of the parlor; and, although it may occasionally offer us a word or a phrase having some philological or historical interest, it does not approach the dignity of a dialect. The bad grammar of illiterate ignorance, without rule or art, it even lacks the consistency in error with which some of our writers seek to invest it; for it recognizes no precedent and follows no analogy. And yet the real lingo is not half so bad as it is represented in print, where it is sought to set it before us phonetically. It is obvious that the ordinary speech of any of our white communities would look very much like a jargon if subjected to the same phonetic process. In our common conversation, very few of us are purists, and a precisian is generally regarded as affected and pretentious.

In actual life the negro talks more or less like the white persons he serves or comes most frequently in contact with; but when some of our accomplished literary artists attempt to delineate him, this likeness utterly disappears, and his "English as she is spoke" is exaggerated in all its features by elision and every literal device, while that of his white interlocutors is revised according to Noah Webster and Lindley Murray. The treatment accorded the two races in this murdering of the language is analogous to that dispensed to murderers under our old colonial laws, which allowed benefit of clergy to whites and denied it to negroes. This discrimination, however, is not only against the Reconstruction acts and the Civil Rights bill, but is forbidden by the Federal Constitution, as now amended; and it is to be said further, in behalf of printers and readers, that a fair and equal orthographical and syntactical dispensation would at once wipe out a large proportion of the lingual barbarisms attributed to the negro, while in many others he would appear to be no greater sinner than his former master and mistress. Yet it is greatly to be apprehended that the conventional negro and his conventional lingo are firmly fixed in our literature, albeit the real negroes would look upon him as an "outlander," and could not possibly comprehend the lingo if spoken as printed.

The truth is that the great body of the lingo commonly regarded as distinctively the negro's is equally the lingo of the wholly uneducated and socially degraded white, while always the city negro and the "house" servant speak a language much more correct than that of the mass of "field-hands," black or white. Yet, with all the abatements

indicated, there still remains a real negro lingo, having its peculiar and distinguishing characteristics. The principal of these cannot be shown by mere spelling or pronunciation. They exist in the tone of his voice, his manner of speech, his inarticulate interpellations and interjections. After these comes his frequent use of words in utterly unexpected senses. His mere mispronunciation, in so far as it is peculiarly his, consists largely in clipping his words, though he sometimes expands them. While he has a good ear for tunes, he has little or none for the difference in the sounds of the vowels, and he employs them without distinction, saying *amplay*, *employ*, *implay*, *omplay*, and *umplay*, with equal confidence that he is right, if not with some pride in his variations. With the consonants he is all right, except as to *r*, *v*, *w*, and the *th* of the, then, that, etc. He says *de*, *den*, *dat*; but he has no difficulty whatever with thin, think, thing, thank, and the like,—never saying *dink*, *ding*, nor yet *t'ink*, *t'ing* (notwithstanding many examples in print to the contrary), unless he has had some association with foreigners, or with an old "mammy" who has adopted this sort of talk in her vocation as nurse.

With respect to *r*, *v*, and *w*, he uses them quite as often as he avoids them, and, if he sometimes substitutes *w* for *v*, he never, or hardly ever, puts *v* for *w*. He indifferently says vinegar and winegar, vote and wote, etc., but for final *v* he gives us *b*, as in *gib* for give, *lub* for love, etc. Nevertheless he has no disability as to *v*, and readily says give, etc., whenever he chooses. For "give me," however, he as often says "gi' me," "gimme," and "gin me," as "gib me," and he extends this facility in variation to many words, as *gwine*, *a-gwine*, *goi'n'*, and *go'n'*, for going. The final *r* of words and syllables he usually sounds very softly, or slurs over, as nearly everybody does in the Southern States; but this by no means warrants the conventional rule which puts an *h* in place of every final *r*, for the negro can and does pronounce *r* as well as anybody, and sometimes he gives a long roll to it that would startle a Frenchman, as when, for master, instead of saying *massa* or *mahsah*, he elects to say *mar-r-ster-r*, which he frequently does. He can and does say war, carry, carriage, marry, marriage, occasionally, but he prefers to say *waw*, *ca'y*, *ca'age*, *ma'y*, *ma'age*; yet he always says sorry, harrow, harness, bar, tar, *arter*, *narry*, *dar*, *thar*, etc. *H* rarely troubles him; yet when he is emphatic and loud he is apt to say *hit* for it and *hox* for ox, etc.; but I can recall no instance where he omits *h* at the beginning of words. He pronounces *length* *lengt'*, where the uneducated white uses *len'th*; and he says *heall'* or *healf* for health, *wid* for with, *mont'* for month, *mouf* for mouth, etc. In the particulars cited no white person talks like the negro, unless, indeed, he has become a negro in all but his skin.

In his use of the word "done," Sambo has no competitor. He employs it for various parts of the verbs to be and to have, as, "he done dead," "dey done gone," "we done eat," etc., and he makes it do double, triple, and quadruple duty on its own account, as, for "I have done it," he says, "I done done it," or "I done and done done it," or "I done and done and done done it," according as he wishes to be more or less impressive. He uses "tote" in some of the senses of "carry,"

as also do many Southern white people, but chiefly signifying to bear a burden. It is never used by anybody as it recently appeared in print, where the writer made a negro say, "I'll tote de horse." He might as well have made the negro say, "I'll ca'y de mountain." He largely employs "allow," clipping it to "'low" or "'lows," and meaning to "say" or "think;" as, "he 'lowed,"—that is, he said or thought. It is pretty much in the same sense that "allow" is used by Viola in "Twelfth Night:"

for I can sing
And speak to him in many sorts of music
That will *allow* me very worth his service.

That is, the music will show or declare that she is very worthy, etc.

The employment of *on* for *of*, as in "many on us," "out'n it," etc., has a multitude of Shakespearean precedents. Leontes, in "A Winter's Tale," speaks of "many thousand on's;" and the Chancellor, in "Henry VIII.," says, "Would I were fairly out on't." In "Macbeth," Lady Macbeth declares of Banquo, "He cannot come out on's grave." Of other survivals in the lingo, the following are cited. In "Coriolanus," Menenius says, "All this is '*long of you*,'" and in the same play Lady Valeria tells how the little son of Coriolanus "*mam-mocked*" a butterfly. The Duke of Somerset, in "Henry VI.," after repeating Montague's dying words, adds, "and more he spoke . . . that *mought* not be distinguished;" and the Duke of Clarence, in the same drama, cries, "I will not *ruinate* my father's house." Prospero, in "The Tempest," telling his daughter how they came to the island, declares that they were "blessedly *help* hither." Iago speaks of "*yerk-ing*" Brabantio under the ribs; and in "Henry V.," Mountjoy describes how "their steeds *yerk* out their armed heels." "She *swounds*," says the King, in "Hamlet;" both Speedwell and Launce, in "Two Gentlemen of Verona," use "*swinge*" in the sense of to whip or to beat; "*handkercher*" is the prevailing Shakespearean word, though "handkerchief" supersedes it in "Othello;" Iago calls Roderigo and Bianca "poor trash;" and of these and other peculiarities of our negro talk many more instances could be cited from the great dramatist, as of "for to," "God he knows," "*strucken*," etc.

Undoubtedly the negro should carry his lingo wherever he goes, until the common schools, Hampton Institute, Oberlin College, Howard University, and other institutions of learning shall have corrected his speech. It is too characteristic to be omitted. Yet all its tediousness need not be bestowed upon us, like Dogberry's upon Leonato. Where Sambo plays an obscure part, teach him to hold his tongue; and where he is prominent and must be heard, don't subject him to phonetics, but let his faults of speech be tenderly indicated, or understood, rather than grossly expressed. Let elision clip him only where it must, and make orthography overlook his venial errors. Enough will remain in the more striking of his deviations from verbal propriety for all the purposes of legitimate amusement, interest, and art. Above all things, let the lingoist emulate the wisdom of the oyster, which knows so well when to shut its mouth.

William Cecil Elam.

A TAME SURRENDER.

A STORY OF THE CHICAGO STRIKE.

BY

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING, U.S.A.,

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "THE DESERTER," "FROM
THE RANKS," "A SOLDIER'S SECRET," "SERGEANT
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